THE MAGAZINE OF Fantasy AND Science Fiction

The Seeing I
TV commentary by
CHARLES BEAUMONT

DECEMBER 40¢

MARK CLIFTON
ROBERT NATHAN

STEPHEN BARR
MARCEL AYMÉ
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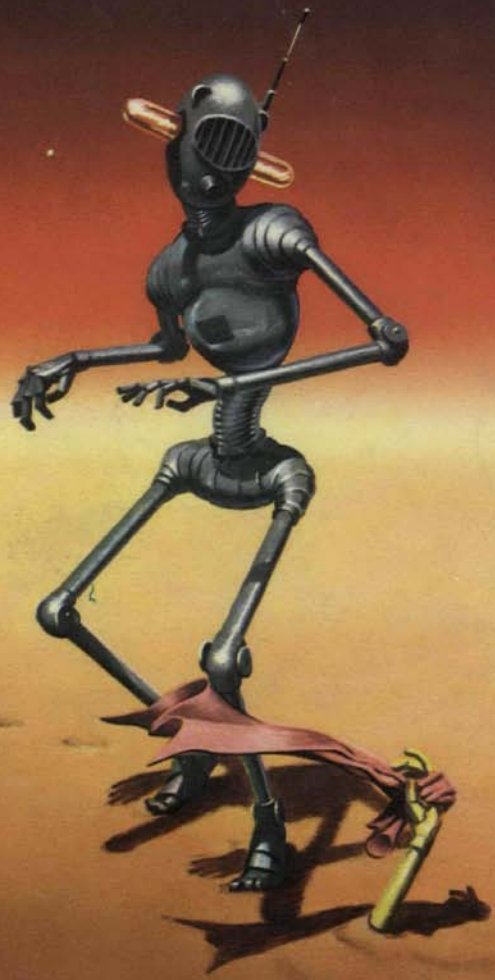

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

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Cover by Mel Hunter
(see "In this issue . . ." for comment)

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In this issue . . .

Mel Hunter's cover this month is the third in his series for F&SF concerning the adventures of "the last man." The first, you may remember, showed him tenderly watering a rose richly blooming in a desert wasteland; in the second, he was wistfully poring through mail order catalogues he had unearthed in an old packing crate. As for his discovery of the new Eve in his current adventure—Mr. Hunter is resolutely uncommunicative as to when, or even if, a marriage will take place. Follow F&SF's covers faithfully so that you will be sure not to miss the next disturbing installment. . . .

Charles Beaumont used to conduct a column in these pages called "The Science Stage," in which he cast a discerning eye on the science fantasy products of Hollywood—and generally found them wanting, euphemistically speaking. Times have changed somewhat, however, and there seems to be reason to hope that television producers may well be on the verge of doing much better by our field than they or the movie producers have done in the past, and we have recalled the knowledgeable and perceptive Mr. Beaumont to make a fresh survey. His new column, "The Seeing I," will be appearing here from time to time, as circumstances in Hollywood and New York studios warrant.

Last July, we offered $100. to the reader with the best suggestion for exploiting the curious properties of Stan Budzik's machine in "Success Story," by H. M. Sycamore. The response was large, and the suggestions varied and ingenious; the judges had a most difficult time. In the end, the check and our congratulations were sent to J. Martin Graetz, of Cambridge, Mass. And to the rest of you who entered, we offer our congratulations, too—on your inventive and competitive spirits. (Better luck next time!)

Coming next month . . .

The Final Gentleman (short novelet)	CLIFFORD SIMAK
The Only Game in Town (a Time Patrol short novelet)	POUL ANDERSON
Double, Double, Toil and Trouble	HOLLEY CANTINE
The Blind Pilot *translated from the French by*	CHARLES HENNEBERG DAMON KNIGHT

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It has been said of the retired personnel expert, Mark Clifton, that each story he does is different in approach and style from the last. There are two constants, however—Mr. Clifton always has something to say, and he always says it in a way to command the reader's interest. The dramatic case in point raises one of the most important questions we will face when we go out in space; can you answer it?

WHAT NOW, LITTLE MAN?

by Mark Clifton

THE MYSTERY OF WHAT MADE THE goonie tick tormented me for twenty years.

Why, when that first party of big game hunters came to Libo, why didn't the goonies run away and hide, or fight back? Why did they instantly, immediately, almost seem to say, "You want us to die, Man? For you we will do it gladly!" Didn't they have any sense of survival at all? How could a species survive if it lacked that sense?

"Even when one of the hunters, furious at being denied the thrill of the chase, turned a machine gun on the drove of them," I said to Paul Tyler, "they just stood there and let him mow them down."

Paul started to say something in quick protest, then simply looked sick.

"Oh yes," I assured him. "One of them did just that. There was a hassle over it. Somebody reminded him that the machine gun was designed just to kill human beings, that it wasn't sporting to turn it on game. The hassle sort of took the edge off their fun, so they piled into their space yacht and took off for some other place where they could count on a chase before the kill."

I felt his sharp stare, but I pretended to be engrossed in measuring the height of Libo's second sun above the mountain range in the west. Down below us, from where we sat and smoked on Sentinel Rock, down in my valley and along the sides of the river, we could see the goonie herds gathering under their groves of pal trees before night fell.

Paul didn't take issue, or feed

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me that line about harvesting the game like crops, or this time even kid me about my contempt for Earthers. He was beginning to realize that all the old timer Liboans felt as I did, and that there was reasonable justification for doing so. In fact, Paul was fast becoming Liboan himself. I probably wouldn't have told him the yarn about that first hunting party if I hadn't sensed it, seen the way he handled his own goonies, the affection he felt for them.

"Why were our animals ever called goonies, Jim?" he asked. "They're . . . Well, you know the goonie."

I smiled to myself at his use of the possessive pronoun, but I didn't comment on it.

"That too," I said, and knocked the dottle out of my pipe. "That came out of the first hunting party." I stood up and stretched to get a kink out of my left leg, and looked back toward the house to see if my wife had sent a goonie to call us in to dinner. It was a little early, but I stood a moment to watch Paul's team of goonies up in the yard, still folding their harness beside his rickashaw. I'd sold them to him, as yearlings, a couple of years before, as soon as their second pelt showed they'd be a matched pair. Now they were mature young males, and as handsome a team as could be found anywhere on Libo.

I shook my head and marveled, oh for maybe the thousandth time, at the impossibility of communicating the goonie to anyone who hadn't seen them. The ancient Greek sculptors didn't mind combining human and animal form, and somebody once said the goonie began where those sculptors left off. No human muscle cultist ever managed quite the perfect symmetry natural to the goonie—grace without calculation, beauty without artifice. Their pelts varied in color from the silver blonde of this pair to a coal black, and their huge eyes from the palest topaz to an emerald green, and from emerald green to deep-hued amethyst. The tightly curled mane spread down the nape and flared out over the shoulders like a cape to blend with the short, fine pelt covering the body. Their faces were like Greek sculpture, too, yet not human. No, not human. Not even humanoid, because—well, because that was a comparison never made on Libo. That comparison was one thing we couldn't tolerate. Definitely, then, neither human nor humanoid.

I turned from watching the team which, by now, had finished folding their harness into neat little piles and had stretched out on the ground to rest beside the rickashaw. I sat back down and packed my pipe again with a Libo weed we called tobacco.

"Why do we call them goon-

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ies?" I repeated Paul's question. "There's a big bird on Earth. Inhabits some of the South Sea islands, millions of them crowd together to nest. Most stupid creature on Earth, seems like, the way they behave on their nesting grounds. A man can hardly walk among them; they don't seem to know enough to move out of the way, and don't try to protect themselves or their nests. Some reason I don't know, it's called the Goonie Bird. Guess the way these animals on Libo behaved when that hunting party came and shot them down, didn't run away, hide, or fight, reminded somebody of that bird. The name stuck."

Paul didn't say anything for a while. Then he surprised me.

"It's called the Goonie Bird when it's on the ground," he said slowly. "But in the air it's the most magnificent flying creature known to man. In the air, it's called the albatross."

I felt a chill. I knew the legend, of course, the old-time sailor superstition. Kill an albatross and bad luck will haunt you, dog you all the rest of your days. But either Paul didn't know The Rime of the Ancient Mariner or was too tactful a young man to make it plainer. I supplied the Libo colony with its fresh meat. The only edible animal on the planet was the goonie.

Carson's Hill comes into the yarn I have to tell—in a way is responsible. Sooner or later almost every young tenderfoot finds it, and in his mind it is linked with anguish, bitterness, emotional violence, suppressed fury.

It is a knoll, the highest point in the low range of hills that separates my valley from the smaller cup which shelters Libo City. Hal Carson, a buddy of mine in the charter colony, discovered it. Flat on top, it is a kind of granite table surrounded by giant trees, which make of it a natural amphitheatre, almost like a cathedral in feeling. A young man can climb up there and be alone to have it out with his soul.

At one time or another, most do. *"Go out to the stars, young man, and grow up with the universe!"* the posters say all over Earth. It has its appeal for the strongest, the brightest, the best. Only the dull-eyed breeders are content to stay at home.

In the Company recruiting offices they didn't take just anybody, no matter what his attitude was—no indeed. Anybody, for example, who started asking questions about how and when he might get back home—with the fortune he would make—was coldly told that if he were already worrying about getting back he shouldn't be going.

Somehow, the young man was never quite sure how, it became a challenge to his bravery, his daring, his resourcefulness. It was a

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bait which a young fellow, anxious to prove his masculinity, the most important issue of his life, couldn't resist. The burden of proof shifted from the Company to the applicant, so that where he had started out cautiously inquiring to see if this offer might suit him, he wound up anxiously trying to prove he was the one they wanted.

Some wag in the barracks scuttlebutt once said, "They make you so afraid they won't take you, it never occurs to you that you'd be better off if they didn't."

"A fine mess," somebody else exclaimed, and let a little of his secret despair show through. "To prove you are a man, you lose the reason for being one."

That was the rub, of course.

Back when man was first learning how to misuse atomic power, everybody got all excited about the effects of radiation on germ plasm. Yet nobody seemed much concerned over the effects of unshielded radiation in space on that germ plasm—out from under the protecting blanket of Earth's atmosphere, away from the natural conditions where man had evolved.

There could be no normal colony of man here on Libo—no children. Yet the goonies, so unspeakably resembling man, could breed and bear. It gave the tenderfoot a smouldering resentment against the goonie which a psychologist could have explained; that wild, unreasoning fury man must feel when frustration is tied in with prime sex—submerged and festering because simple reason told the tenderfoot that the goonie was not to blame.

The tide of bitterness would swell up to choke the young tenderfoot there alone on Carson's Hill. No point to thinking of home, now. No point to dreaming of his triumphant return—space-burnt, strong, virile, remote with the vastness of space in his eyes—ever.

Unfair to the girl he had left behind that he should hold her with promises of loyalty, the girl, with ignorance equal to his own, who had urged him on. Better to let her think he had changed, grown cold, lost his love of her—so that she could fulfil her function, turn to someone else, some damned Company reject—but a reject who could still father children.

Let them. Let them strain themselves to populate the universe!

At this point the angry bitterness would often spill over into unmanly tears (somebody in the barracks had once said that Carson's Hill should be renamed Crying Hill, or Tenderfoot's Lament). And the tortured boy, despising himself, would gaze out over my valley and long for home, long for the impossible undoing of what had been done to him.

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Yes, if there hadn't been a Carson's Hill there wouldn't be a yarn to tell. But then, almost every place has a Carson's Hill, in one form or another, and Earthers remain Earthers for quite a while. They can go out to the stars in a few days or weeks, but it takes a little longer before they begin to grow up with the universe.

Quite a little longer, I was to find. Still ahead of me, I was to have my own bitter session there again, alone—an irony because I'd thought I'd come to terms with myself up there some twenty years ago.

It is the young man who is assumed to be in conflict with his society, who questions its moral and ethical structures, and yet I wonder. Or did I come of age late, very late? Still, when I look back, it was the normal thing to accept things as we found them, to be so concerned with things in their relationship to us that we had no time for wonder about relationships not connected with us. Only later, as man matures, has time to reflect—has something left over from the effort to survive. . . .

When I first came to Libo, I accepted the goonie as an animal, a mere source of food. It was Company policy not to attempt a colony where there was no chance for self-support. Space shipping-rates made it impossible to supply a colony with food for more than a short time while it was being established. Those same shipping rates make it uneconomical to ship much in the way of machinery, to say nothing of luxuries. A colony has to have an indigenous source of food and materials, and if any of that can also be turned into labor, all the better. I knew that. I accepted it as a matter of course.

And even as I learned about my own dead seed, I learned that the same genetic principles applied to other Earth life, that neither animal nor plant could be expected to propagate away from Earth. No, the local ecology had to be favorable to man's survival, else no colony. I accepted that, it was reasonable.

The colony of Libo was completely dependent on the goonie as the main source of its food. The goonie was an animal to be used for food, as is the chicken, the cow, the rabbit, on Earth. The goonie is beautiful, but so is the gazelle,, which is delicious. The goonie is vaguely shaped like a human, but so is the monkey which was once the prime source of protein food for a big part of Earth's population. I accepted all that, without question.

Perhaps it was easy for me. I was raised on a farm, where slaughtering of animals for food was commonplace. I had the average farm boy's contempt for the dainty young lady in the fashion-

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able city restaurant who, without thought, lifts a bite of rare steak, dripping with blood, to her pearly teeth; but who would turn pale and retch at the very thought of killing an animal. Where did she think that steak came from?

At first we killed the goonies around our encampment which was to become Libo City; went out and shot them as we needed them, precisely as hunters do on Earth. In time we had to go farther and farther in our search for them, so I began to study them, in hope I could domesticate them. I learned one of their peculiarities—they were completely dependent upon the fruit of the pal-tree, an ever-bearing tree. Each goonie had its own pal tree, and we learned by experiment that they would starve before they would eat the fruit from any other pal tree.

There was another peculiarity which we don't yet understand, and yet we see it in rudimentary form on Earth where game breeds heartily during seasons of plentiful food, and sparsely in bad years. Here, the goonie did not bear young unless there were unclaimed pal trees available, and did bear young up to the limit of such trees.

My future was clear, then. Obtain the land and plant the pal trees to insure a constant supply of meat for the colony. It was the farm boy coming out in me, no doubt, but no different from any farm boy who grows up and wants to own his own farm, his own cattle ranch.

I was a young man trying to build a secure future for himself. There was no thought of the goonie except as a meat supply. I accepted that as a matter of course. And as Libo City grew, I continued to increase my planting of pal trees in my valley, and my herds of goonies.

It was only later, much later, that I found the goonie could also be trained for work of various kinds. I accepted this, too, in the same spirit we trained colts on the farm to ride, to pull the plow, to work.

Perhaps it was this training, only for the crudest tasks at first, then later, calling for more and more skill, that proved my undoing. On the farm we separated our pet animals from the rest; we gave our pets names, but we never gave names to those destined for slaughter, nor formed any affection for them. This was taboo. I found myself carrying out the same procedures here. I separated those goonies I trained from the meat herds. Then I separated the common labor goonies from the skilled labor.

I should have stopped there—at least there. But when man's curiosity is aroused. . . . Can we say to the research scientist, "You may ask this question, but you are

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forbidden to ask that one. You may take this step, but you must not take a second, to see what lies beyond." Can we say that to the human mind? I did not say it to myself.

I taught certain goonies to speak, to read, to write.

The goonies accepted this training in the same joyful exuberance they accepted everything else from man. I never understood it, not until now. Their whole behavior, their whole being seemed the same as greeted the first hunting party. "You want us to die, man? For you, we will do it gladly."

Whatever man wanted, the goonie gave, to the limit of his capacity. And I had not found that limit.

I took one step too many. I know that now.

And yet, should I not have taken that last step—teaching them to speak, to read, to write? The capacity was in them for learning it all the time. Was it finding it out that made the difference? But what kind of moral and ethic structure is it that depends on ignorance for its support?

Miriam Wellman comes into the yarn, too. She was the catalyst. My destruction was not her fault. It would have come about anyway. She merely hastened it. She had a job to do, she did it well. It worked out as she planned, a cauterizing kind of thing, burning out a sore that was beginning to fester on Libo—to leave us hurting a little, but clean.

Important though she was, she still remains a little hazy to me, a little unreal. Perhaps I was already so deep into my quandary, without knowing it, that both people and things were a little hazy, and the problem deep within me my only reality.

I was in Libo City the day she landed from the tender that serviced the planets from the mother ship orbiting out in space. I saw her briefly from the barbershop across the street when she came out of the warehouse and walked down our short main street to the Company Administration Building. She was a dark-haired little thing, sharp-eyed, neither young nor old—a crisp, efficient career gal, she seemed to me. I didn't see any of the men on the street make a pass at her. She had the looks, all right, but not the look.

There weren't more than a dozen women on the whole planet, childless women who had foregone having children, who had raked up the exorbitant space fare and come on out to join their man anyhow; and the men should have been falling all over Miriam Wellman—but they weren't. They just looked, and then looked at each other. Nobody whistled.

I got a little more of what had happened from the head warehouseman, who was a friend of

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mine. He smelled something wrong, he said, the minute the tender cut its blasts and settled down. Usually there's joshing, not always friendly, between the tender crew and the warehouse crew —the contempt of the spaceman for the landbound; the scorn of the landbound for the glamorboy spacemen who think their sweat is wine.

Not today. The pilot didn't come out of his cabin at all to stretch his legs; he sat there looking straight ahead, and the ships' crew started hustling the dock loaders almost before the hatches opened for unloading a few supplies and loading our packages of libolines—the jewel stone which is our excuse for being.

She came down the gangplank, he said, gave a crisp-careless flick of her hand toward the pilot, who must have caught it out of the corner of his eye for he nodded briefly, formally, and froze. Later we learned he was not supposed to tell us who she really was, but he did his best. Only we didn't catch it.

She came across the yard with all the human warehousemen staring, but not stepping toward her. Only the goonies seemed unaware. In their fashion, laughing and playing, and still turning out more work than humans could, they were already cleaning out the holds and trucking the supplies over to the loading dock.

She came up the little flight of stairs at the end of the dock and approached Hal, the head warehouseman, who, he said, was by that time bugeyed.

"Do you always let those creatures go around stark naked?" she asked in a low, curious voice. She waved toward the gangs of goonies.

He managed to get his jaw unhinged enough to stammer.

"Why, Ma'am," he says he said, "they're only animals."

Nowdays, when he tells it, he claims he saw a twinkle of laughter in her eyes. I don't believe it. She was too skilled in the part she was playing.

She looked at him, she looked back at the goonies, and she looked at him again. By then he said he was blushing all over, and sweating as if the dry air of Libo was a steam room. It wasn't any trick to see how she was comparing, what she was thinking. And every stranger was warned, before he landed, that the one thing the easy-going Liboan wouldn't tolerate was comparison of goonie with man. Beside them we looked raw, unfinished, poorly done by an amateur. There was only one way we could bear it—there could be no comparison.

He says he knows he turned purple, but before he could think of anything else to say, she swept on past him, through the main aisle of the warehouse, and out the

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front door. All he could do was stand there and try to think of some excuse for living, he said.

She had that effect on people—she cut them down to bedrock with a word, a glance. She did it deliberately. Yes, she came as a Mass Psychology Therapist, a branch of pseudo-science currently epidemic on Earth which believed in the value of emotional purges whipped up into frenzies. She came as a prime trouble-maker, as far as we could see at the time. She came to see that the dear, fresh boys who were swarming out to conquer the universe didn't fall into the evil temptations of space.

She came at the critical time. Libo City had always been a small frontier spaceport, a lot like the old frontier towns of primitive Earth—a street of warehouses, commissaries, an administration building, couple of saloons, a meeting hall, the barracks, a handful of cottages for the men with wives, a few more cottages built by pairs of young men who wanted to shake free of barracks life for a while, but usually went back to it. Maybe there should have been another kind of House, also, but Earth was having another of its periodic moral spasms, and the old women of the male sex who comprised the Company's Board of Directors threw up their hands in hypocritical horror at the idea of sex where there was no profit to be made from the sale of diapers and cribs and pap.

Now it was all changing. Libo City was mushrooming. The Company had made it into a shipping terminal to serve the network of planets still out beyond as the Company extended its areas of exploitation. More barracks and more executive cottages were going up as fast as goonie labor could build them. Hundreds of tenderfoot Earthers were being shipped in to handle the clerical work of the terminal. Hundreds of Earthers, all at once, to bring with them their tensions, their callousness, swaggering, boasting, cruelties and sadisms which were natural products of life on Earth—and all out of place here where we'd been able to assimilate a couple or so at a time, when there hadn't been enough to clique up among themselves; they'd had to learn a life of calmness and reason if they wanted to stay.

Perhaps Miriam Wellman was a necessity. The dear, fresh boys filled the meeting hall, overflowed it, moved the nightly meetings to the open ground of the landing field. She used every emotional trick of the rabble-rouser to whip them up into frenzies, made them drunk on emotion, created a scene of back-pounding, shouting, jittering maniacs. It was a good lesson for anybody who might believe in the progress of the human race toward reason, intelligence.

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I had my doubts about the value of what she was doing, but for what it was, she was good. She knew her business.

Paul Tyler put the next part of the pattern into motion. I hadn't seen him since our talk about the first hunting party, but when we settled down in our living room chairs with our pipes and our tall cool glasses, it was apparent he'd been doing some thinking. He started off obliquely.

"About three years ago," he said, as he set his glass back down on the table, "just before I came out here from Earth, I read a book by an Australian hunter of kangaroos."

The tone of his voice made it more than idle comment. I waited.

"This fellow *told* the reader, every page or so, how stupid the kangaroo is. But everything he said *showed* how intelligent it is, how perfectly it adapts to its natural environment, takes every advantage. Even a kind of rough tribal organization in the herds, a recognized tribal ownership of lands, battles between tribes or individuals that try to poach, an organized initiation of a stray before it can be adopted into a tribe."

"Then how did he justify calling it stupid?" I asked.

"Maybe the real question is 'Why?' "

"You answer it," I said.

"The economy of Australia is based on sheep," he said. "And sheep, unaided, can't compete with kangaroos. The kangaroo's teeth are wedge shaped to bite clumps, and they can grow fat on new growth while sheep are still down into the heart of grass unable to get anything to eat. The kangaroo's jump takes him from clump to sparse clump where the sheep will walk himself to death trying to stave off starvation. So the kangaroo has to go, because it interferes with man's desires."

"Does that answer 'Why?' " I asked.

"Doesn't it?" he countered. "They have to keep it killed off, if man is to prosper. So they have to deprecate it, to keep their conscience clear. If we granted the goonie equal intelligence with man, could we use it for food? Enslave it for labor?"

I was quick with a denial.

"The goonie was tested for intelligence," I said sharply. "Only a few months after the colony was founded. The Department of Extraterrestrial Psychology sent out a team of testers. Their work was exhaustive, and their findings unequivocal."

"This was before you trained goonies for work?" he asked.

"Well, yes," I conceded. "But as I understood it, their findings ran deeper than just breaking an animal to do some work patterns. It

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had to do with super-ego, conscience. You know, we've never seen any evidence of tribal organization, any of the customs of the primitive man, no sense of awe, fear, worship. Even their mating seems to be casual, without sense of pairing, permanence. Hardly even herd instinct, except that they grouped where pal trees clustered. But on their own, undirected, nobody ever saw them plant the pal tree. The psychologists were thorough. They just didn't find evidence to justify calling the goonie intelligent."

"That was twenty years ago," he said. "Now they understand our language, complicated instruction. You've taught them to speak, read, and write."

I raised my brows. I didn't think anyone knew about that except Ruth, my wife.

"Ruth let the cat out of the bag," he said with a smile. "But I already knew about the speaking. As you say, the goonie has no fear, no conscience, no sense of concealment. They speak around anybody. You can't keep it concealed, Jim."

"I suppose not," I said.

"Which brings me to the point. Have you gone a step farther? Have you trained any to do clerical work?"

"Matter of fact," I admitted. "I have. The Company has sharp pencils. If I didn't keep up my records, they'd take the fillings out of my teeth before I knew what was happening. I didn't have humans, so I trained goonies to do the job. Under detailed instruction, of course," I added.

"I need such a clerk, myself," he said. "There's a new office manager, fellow by name of Carl Hest. A—well, maybe you know the kind. He's taken a particular dislike to me for some reason—well, all right, I know the reason. I caught him abusing his rickashaw goonie, and told him off before I knew who he was. Now he's getting back at me through my reports. I spend more time making corrected reports, trying to please him, than I do in mining libolines. It's rough. I've got to do something, or he'll accumulate enough evidence to get me shipped back to Earth. My reports didn't matter before, so long as I brought in my quota of libolines—the clerks in Libo City fixed up my reports for me. But now I've got to do both, with every T crossed and I dotted. It's driving me nuts."

"I had a super like that when I was a Company man," I said, with sympathy. "It's part of the nature of the breed."

"You train goonies and sell them for all other kinds of work," he said, at last. "I couldn't afford to buy an animal trained that far, but could you rent me one? At least while I get over this hump?"

I was reluctant, but then, why not? As Paul said, I trained goo-

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nies for all other kinds of work, why not make a profit on my clerks? What was the difference? And, it wouldn't be too hard to replace a clerk. They may have no intelligence, as the psychologists defined it, but they learned fast, needed to be shown only once.

"About those kangaroos," I said curiously. "How did that author justify calling them stupid?"

Paul looked at me with a little frown.

"Oh," he said, "Various ways. For example, a rancher puts up a fence, and a chased kangaroo will beat himself to death trying to jump over it to go through it. Doesn't seem to get the idea of going around it. Things like that."

"Does seem pretty stupid," I commented.

"An artificial, man-made barrier," he said. "Not a part of its natural environment, so it can't cope with it."

"Isn't that the essence of intelligence?" I asked. "To analyze new situations, and master them?"

"Looking at it from man's defintion of intelligence, I guess," he admitted.

"What other definition do we have?" I asked. . . .

I went back to the rental of the goonie, then, and we came to a mutually satisfactory figure. I was still a little reluctant, but I couldn't have explained why. There was something about the speaking, reading, writing, clerical work—I was reluctant to let it get out of my own hands, but reason kept asking me why. Pulling a rickashaw, or cooking, or serving the table, or building a house, or writing figures into a ledger and adding them up—what difference?

In the days that followed, I couldn't seem to get Paul's conversation out of my mind. It wasn't only that I'd rented him a clerk against my feelings of reluctance. It was something he'd said, something about the kangaroos. I went back over the conversation, reconstructed it sentence by sentence, until I pinned it down.

"Looking at it from man's definition of intelligence," he had said.

"What other definition do we have?" I had asked.

What about the goonie's definition? That was a silly question. As far as I knew, goonies never defined anything. They seemed to live only for the moment. Perhaps the unfailing supply of fruit from their pal tree, the lack of any natural enemy, had never taught them a sense of want, or fear. And therefore, of conscience? There was no violence in their nature, no resistance to anything. How, then, could man ever hope to understand the goonie? All right, perhaps a resemblance in physical shape, but a mental life so totally alien. . . .

Part of the answer came to me then.

Animal psychology tests, I rea-

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soned, to some degree *must* be based on how man, himself, would react in a given situation. The animal's intelligence is measured largely in terms of how close it comes to the behavior of man. A man would discover, after a few tries, that he must go around the fence; but the kangaroo couldn't figure that out—it was too far removed from anything in a past experience which included no fences, no barriers.

Alien beings are not man, and do not, cannot, react in the same way as man. Man's tests, therefore, based solely on his own standards, will never prove any other intelligence in the universe equal to man's own!

The tests were as rigged as a crooked slot machine.

But the goonie did learn to go around the fence. On his own? No, I couldn't say that. He had the capacity for doing what was shown him, and repeating it when told. But he never did anything on his own, never initiated anything, never created anything. He followed complicated instructions by rote, but only by rote. Never as if he understood the meanings, the abstract meanings. He made sense when he did speak, did not just jabber like a parrot, but he spoke only in direct monosyllables—the words, themselves, a part of the mechanical pattern. I gave it up. Perhaps the psychologists were right, after all.

A couple of weeks went by before the next part of the pattern fell into place. Paul brought back the goonie clerk.

"What happened?" I asked, when we were settled in the living room with drinks and pipes. "Couldn't he do the work?"

"Nothing wrong with the goonie," he said, a little sullenly. "I don't deserve a smart goonie. I don't deserve to associate with grown men. I'm still a kid with no sense."

"Well now," I said with a grin. "Far be it from me to disagree with a man's own opinion of himself. What happened?"

"I told you about this Carl Hest? The Office Manager?"

I nodded.

"This morning my monthly reports were due. I took them into Libo City with my libolines. I wasn't content just to leave them with the receiving clerk, as usual. Oh, no! I took them right on in to Mr. High-and-mighty Hest, himself. I slapped them down on his desk and I said, 'All right, bud, see what you can find wrong with them this time.'"

Paul began scraping the dottle out of his pipe and looked at me out of the corner of his eyes.

I grinned more broadly.

"I can understand," I said. "I was a Company man once, myself."

"This guy Hest," Paul continued "raised his eyebrows, picked up

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the reports as if they'd dirty his hands, flicked through them to find my dozens of mistakes at a glance. Then he went back over them—slowly. Finally, after about ten minutes, he laid them down on his desk. 'Well, Mr. Tyler,' he said in that nasty voice of his, 'What happened to you? Come down with an attack of intelligence?'

"I should have quit when my cup was full," Paul said, after I'd had my laugh. "But oh, no. I had to keep pouring and mess up the works—I wasn't thinking about anything but wiping that sneer off his face. 'Those reports you think are so intelligent,' I said, 'were done by a goonie.' Then I said, real loud because the whole office was dead silent, 'How does it feel to know that a goonie can do this work as well as your own suck-up goons—as well as you could, probably, and maybe better?'

"I walked out while his mouth was still hanging open. You know how the tenderfeet are. They pick up the attitude that the goonie is an inferior animal, and they ride it for all it's worth; they take easily to having something they can push around. You know, Jim, you can call a man a dirty name with a smile, and he'll sort of take it; maybe not quite happy about it but he'll take it because you said it right. But here on Libo you don't compare a man with a goonie—not anytime, no how, no matter how you say it."

"So then what happened?" I'd lost my grin, suddenly.

"It all happened in front of his office staff. He's got a lot of those suck-ups that enjoy his humor when he tongue-skins us stupid bastards from out in the field. Their ears were all flapping. They heard the works. I went on about my business around town, and it wasn't more than an hour before I knew I was an untouchable. The word had spread. It grew with the telling. Maybe an outsider wouldn't get the full force of it, but here in Libo, well you know what it would mean to tell a man he could be replaced by a goonie."

"I know," I said around the stem of my pipe, while I watched his face. Something had grabbed my tailbone and was twisting it with that tingling feeling we get in the face of danger. I wondered if Paul even yet, had fully realized what he'd done.

"Hell! All right, Jim, goddamn it!" he exploded. "Suppose a goonie could do their work better? That's not going to throw them out of a job. There's plenty of work, plenty of planets besides this one—even if the Company heard about it and put in goonies at the desks."

"It's not just that," I said slowly. "No matter how low down a man is, he's got to have something he thinks is still lower before he can be happy. The more inferior he is, the more he needs it. Take it away

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from him and you've started something."

"I guess," Paul agreed, but I could see he had his reserve of doubt. Well, he was young, and he'd been fed that scout-master line about how noble mankind is. He'd learn.

"Anyhow," he said. "Friend of mine, better friend than most, I've found out, tipped me off. Said I'd better get rid of that goonie clerk, and quick, if I knew which side was up. I'm still a Company man, Jim. I'm like the rest of these poor bastards out here, still indentured for my space fare, and wouldn't know how to keep alive if the Company kicked me out and left me stranded. That's what could happen. Those guys can cut my feet out from under me every step I take. You know it. What can I do but knuckle under? So—I brought the goonie back."

I nodded.

"Too bad you didn't keep it under your hat, the way I have," I said. "But it's done now."

I sat and thought about it. I wasn't worried about my part in it—I had a part because everybody would know I'd trained the goonie, that Paul had got him from me. It wasn't likely a little two-bit office manager could hurt me with the Company. They needed me too much. I could raise and train, or butcher, goonies and deliver them cheaper than they could do it themselves. As long as you don't step on their personal egos, the big boys in business don't mind slapping down their underlings and telling them to behave themselves, if there's a buck to be made out of it.

Besides, I was damn good advertising, a real shill, for their recruiting offices. "See?" they'd say. "Look at Jim MacPherson. Just twenty years ago he signed up with the Company to go out to the stars. Today he's a rich man, independent, free enterprise. What he did, you can do." Or they'd make it seem that way. And, they were right. I could go on being an independent operator so long as I kept off the toes of the big boys.

But Paul was a different matter.

"Look," I said. "You go back to Libo City and tell it around that it was just a training experiment I was trying. That it was a failure. That you exaggerated, even lied, to jolt Hest. Maybe that'll get you out from under. Maybe we won't hear anymore about it."

He looked at me, his face stricken. But he could still try to joke about it, after a fashion.

"You said everybody finds something inferior to himse,f," he said. "I can't think of anything lower than I am. I just can't."

I laughed.

"Fine," I said with more heartiness than I really felt. "At one time or another most of us have to get clear down to rock bottom before we can begin to grow up."

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I didn't know then that there was a depth beyond rock bottom, a hole one could get into, with no way out. But I was to learn.

I was wrong in telling Paul we wouldn't hear anything more about it. I heard, the very next day. I was down in the south valley, taking care of the last planting in the new orchard, when I saw a caller coming down the dirt lane between the groves of pal trees. His rickashaw was being pulled by a single goonie, and even at a distance I could see the animal was abused with overwork, if not worse.

Yes, worse, because as they came nearer I could see whip welts across the pelt covering the goonie's back and shoulders. I began a slow boil inside at the needless cruelty, needless because anybody knows the goonie will kill himself with overwork if the master simply asks for it. So my caller was one of the new Earthers, one of the petty little squirts who had to demonstrate his power over the inferior animal.

Apparently Ruth had had the same opinion for instead of treating the caller as an honored guest and sending a goonie to fetch me, as was Libo custom, she'd sent him on down to the orchard. I wondered if he had enough sense to know he'd been insulted. I hoped he did.

Even if I hadn't been scorched to a simmering rage by the time the goonie halted at the edge of the orchard—and sank down on the ground without even unbuckling his harness—I wouldn't have liked the caller. The important way he climbed down out of the rickashaw, the pompous stride he affected as he strode toward me, marked him as some petty Company official.

I wondered how he had managed to get past Personnel. Usually they picked the fine, upstanding, cleancut hero type—a little short on brains, maybe, but full of noble derring-do, and so anxious to be admired they never made any trouble. It must have been Personnel's off day when this one got through—or maybe he had an uncle.

"Afternoon," I greeted him, without friendliness, as he came up.

"I see you're busy," he said briskly. "I am, too. My time is valuable, so I'll come right to the point. My name is Mr. Hest. I'm an executive. You're MacPherson?"

"Mister MacPherson," I answered drily.

He ignored it.

"I hear you've got a goonie trained to bookkeeping. You leased it to Tyler on a thousand-dollar evaluation. An outrageous price, but I'll buy it. I hear Tyler turned it back."

I didn't like what I saw in his

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eyes, or his loose, fat-lipped mouth. Not at all.

"The goonie is unsatisfactory," I said. "The experiment didn't work, and he's not for sale."

"You can't kid me, MacPherson," he said. "Tyler never made up those reports. He hasn't the capacity. I'm an accountant. If you can train a goonie that far, I can train him on into real accounting. The Company could save millions if goonies could take the place of humans in office work."

I knew there were guys who'd sell their own mothers into a two-bit dive if they thought it would impress the boss, but I didn't believe this one had that motive. There was something else, something in the way his avid little eyes looked me over, the way he licked his lips, the way he came out with an explanation that a smart man would have kept to himself.

"Maybe you're a pretty smart accountant," I said in my best hayseed drawl, "but you don't know anything at all about training goonies." I gestured with my head. "How come you're overworking your animal that way, beating him to make him run up those steep hills on those rough roads? Can't you afford a team?"

"He's my property," he said.

"You're not fit to own him," I said, as abruptly. "I wouldn't sell you a goonie of any kind, for any price."

Either the man had the hide of a rhinoceros, or he was driven by a passion I couldn't understand.

"Fifteen hundred," he bid. "Not a penny more."

"Not at any price. Good day, Mr. Hest."

He looked at me sharply, as if he couldn't believe I'd refuse such a profit, as if it were a new experience for him to find a man without a price. He started to say something, then shut his mouth with a snap. He turned abruptly and strode back to his rickashaw. Before he reached it, he was shouting angrily to his goonie to get up out of that dirt and look alive.

I took an angry step toward them and changed my mind. Whatever I did, Hest would later take it out on the goonie. He was that kind of man. I was stopped, too, by the old Liboan custom of never meddling in another man's affairs. There weren't any laws about handling goonies. We hadn't needed them. Disapproval had been enough to bring tenderfeet into line, before. And I hated to see laws like that come to Libo, morals-meddling laws—because it was men like Hest who had the compulsion to get in control of making and enforcing them, who hid behind the badge so they could get their kicks without fear of reprisal.

I didn't know what to do. I went back to planting the orchard and worked until the first sun had set

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and the second was close behind. Then I knocked off, sent the goonies to their pal groves, and went on up to the house.

Ruth's first question, when I came through the kitchen door, flared my rage up again.

"Jim," she said curiously, and a little angry, "Why did you sell that clerk to a man like Hest?"

"But I didn't," I said.

"Here's the thousand, cash, he left with me," she said and pointed to the corner of the kitchen table. "He said it was the price you agreed on. He had me make out a bill of sale. I thought it peculiar because you always take care of business, but he said you wanted to go on working."

"He pulled a fast one, Ruth," I said, my anger rising.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Right after supper I'm going into Libo City. Bill of sale, or not, I'm going to get that goonie back."

"Jim," she said. "Be careful." There was worry in her eyes. "You're not a violent man—and you're not as young as you used to be."

That was something a man would rather not be reminded of, not even by his wife—especially not by his wife.

Inquiry in Libo City led me to Hest's private cottage, but it was dark. I couldn't rouse any response, not even a goonie. I tried the men's dormitories to get a line on him. Most of the young Earthers seemed to think it was a lark, and their idea of good sportsmanship kept them from telling me where to find him. From some of them I sensed a deeper, more turgid undercurrent where good, clean fun might not be either so good or so clean.

In one of the crowded saloons there was a booth of older men, men who'd been here longer, and kept a disdainful distance away from the new Earthers.

"There's something going on, Jim," one of them said. "I don't know just what. Try that hell-raisin', snortin' female. Hest's always hanging around her."

I looked around the booth. They were all grinning a little. So the story of how Hest had outfoxed me had spread, and they could enjoy that part of it. I didn't blame them. But I could tell they didn't sense there was anything more to it than that. They told me where to locate Miriam Wellman's cottage, and added as I started to leave:

"You need any help, Jim, you know where to look." Part of it was to say that in a showdown against the Earthers they were on my side, but most of it was a bid to get in on a little fun, break the monotony.

I found the woman's cottage without trouble, and she answered the door in person. I told her who

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I was, and she invited me in without any coy implications about what the neighbors might think. The cottage was standard, furnished with goonie-made furniture of native materials.

"I'll come right to the point, Miss Wellman," I said.

"Good," she answered crisply. "The boys will be gathering for their meeting, and I like to be prompt."

I started to tell her what I thought of her meetings, how much damage she was doing, how far she was setting Libo back. I decided there wouldn't be any use. People who do that kind of thing, her kind of thing, get their kicks out of the ego-bloating effect of their power over audiences and don't give a good goddamn about how much damage they do.

"I'm looking for Carl Hest," I said. "I understand he's one of your apple-polishers."

She was wearing standard coverall fatigues, but she made a gesture as if she were gathering up folds of a voluminous skirt to show me there was nothing behind them. "I am not hiding Carl Hest," she said scornfully.

"Then you know he is hiding," I paused, and added, "And you probably know he conned my wife out of a valuable goonie. You probably know what he's got in mind to do."

"I do, Mr. MacPherson," she said crisply. "I know very well."

I looked at her, and felt a deep discouragement. I couldn't see any way to get past that shell of hers, that armor of self righteousness—No, that wasn't it. She wasn't quoting fanatic, meaningless phrases at me, clouding the issue with junk. She was a crisp business woman who had a situation well in hand.

"Then you know more than I do," I said. "But I can guess some things. I don't like what I can guess. I trained that goonie, I'm responsible. I'm not going to have it—well, whatever they plan to do with it—just because I trained it to a work that Hest and his toadies don't approve."

"Very commendable sentiments, Mr. MacPherson," she said drily. "But suppose you keep out of an affair that's none of your business. I understood that was Liboan custom, not to meddle in other people's doings."

"That *was* the custom," I said.

She stood up suddenly and walked with quick, short strides across the room to a closet door. She turned around and looked at me, as if she had made up her mind to something.

"It's still a good custom," she said. "Believe it or not, I'm trying to preserve it."

I looked at her dumbfounded.

"By letting things happen, whatever's going to happen to that goonie?" I asked incredulously. "By coming out here and whip-

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ping up the emotions of these boys, stirring up who knows what in them?"

She opened the door of the closet and I could see she was taking out a robe, an iridescent, shimmering thing.

"I know precisely what I'm stirring up," she said. "That's my business. That's what I'm here for."

I couldn't believe it. To whip up the emotions of a mob just for the kicks of being able to to do it was one thing. But to do it deliberately, knowing the effect of arousing primitive savagery. . . .

She turned around and began slipping into the garment. She zipped up the front of it with a crisp motion, and it transformed her. In darkness, under the proper spotlights, the ethereal softness completely masked her calculating efficiency.

"Why?" I demanded. "If you know, if you really do know, why?"

"My work here is about finished," she said, as she came over to her chair and sat down again. "It will do no harm to tell you why. You're not a Company man, and your reputation is one of discretion. . . . The point is, in mass hiring for jobs in such places as Libo, we make mistakes in Personnel. Our tests are not perfect."

"We?" I asked.

"I'm a trouble-shooter for Company Personnel," she said.

"All this mumbo-jumbo," I said. "Getting out there and whipping these boys up into frenzies . . ."

"You know about medical innoculation, vaccination," she said. "Under proper controls, it can be psychologically applied. A little virus, a little fever, and from there on, most people are immune. Some aren't. With some, it goes into a full stage disease. We don't know which is which without test. We have to test. Those who can't pass the test, Mr. MacPherson, are shipped back to Earth. This way we find out quickly, instead of letting some Typhoid Marys gradually infect a whole colony."

"Hest," I said.

"Hest is valuable," she said. "He thinks he is transferred often because we need him to set up procedures and routines. Actually it's because he is a natural focal point for the wrong ones to gather round. Birds of a feather. Sending him out a couple months in advance of a troubleshooter saves us a lot of time. We already know where to look when we get there."

"He doesn't catch on?" I asked.

"People get blinded by their own self importance," she said. "He can't see beyond himself. And," she added, "we vary our techniques."

I sat there and thought about it for a few minutes. I could see the sense in it, and I could see, in the long run, how Libo would be a better, saner place for the innocu-

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lation that would make the better-balanced Earthers so sick of this kind of thing they'd never want any more of it. But it was damned cold-blooded. These scientists! And it was aside from the issue of my goonie clerk.

"All right," I said. "I guess you know what you're doing. But it happens I'm more interested in that goonie clerk."

"That goonie clerk is another focal point," she said. "I've been waiting for some such incident."

"You might have waited a long time," I said.

"Oh, no," she answered. "There's always an incident. We wait for a particularly effective one."

I stood up.

"You'd sacrifice the goonie to the job you're doing," I said.

"Yes," she said shortly. "If it were necessary," she added.

"You can find some other incident, then," I said. "I don't intend to see that goonie mistreated, maybe worse, just to get a result for you."

She stood up quickly, a flash of shimmering light.

"You will keep your hands entirely off it, Mr. MacPherson," she said crisply. "I do not intend to have my work spoiled by amateur meddling. I'm a professional. This kind of thing is my business. I know how to handle it. Keep off, Mr. MacPherson. You don't realize how much damage you could do at this point."

"I'm not a Company man, Miss Wellman," I said hotly. "You can't order me."

I turned around and stalked out of her door and went back to the main street of town. It was nearly deserted now. Only a few of the older hands were sitting around in the saloons, a few so disgusted with the frenetic meetings they wouldn't go even to break the monotony.

I went over to the main warehouse and through the gate to the landing field. The crowd was there, sitting around, standing around, moving around, waiting for the show to start. At the far end there was a platform, all lighted up with floods. It was bare except for a simple lectern at the center. Very effective. Miss Wellman hadn't arrived.

Maybe I could spot Hest somewhere up near the platform.

I threaded my way through the crowd, through knots of young Earthers who were shooting the breeze about happenings of the day, the usual endless gossip over trivialities. For a while I couldn't pin it down, the something that was lacking. Then I realized that the rapt, trance-like hypnotism I expected to see just wasn't there. The magic was wearing off. It was at this stage of the game that a smart rabble-rouser would move on, would sense the satiation and leave while he was still ahead, before everybody began to realize

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how temporary, pointless and empty the whole emotional binge had been. As Miss Wellman had said, her work here was about finished.

But I didn't spot Hest anywhere. I moved on up near the platform. There was a group of five at one corner of the platform.

"Where could I find Mr. Hest?" I asked them casually.

They gave me the big eye, the innocent face, the don't-know shake of the head. They didn't know. I turned away and heard a snicker. I whirled back around and saw only wooden faces, the sudden poker face an amateur puts on when he gets a good hand —later he wonders why everybody dropped out of the pot.

I wandered around some more. I stood on the outside of little knots of men and eavesdropped. I didn't hear anything of value for a while.

It wasn't until there was a buzz in the crowd, and a spotlight swept over to the gate to highlight Miss Wellman's entrance that I heard a snatch of phrase. Maybe it was the excitement that raised that voice just enough for me to hear.

". . . Carson's Hill tonight . . ."

"Shut up, you fool!"

There was a deep silence as the crowd watched Miss Wellman in her shimmering robe; she swept down the path that opened in front of her as if she were floating. But I had the feeling it was an appreciation of good showmanship they felt. I wondered what it had been like a couple of weeks back.

But I wasn't waiting here for anything more. I'd got my answer. Carson's Hill, of course! If Hest and his gang were staging another kind of show, a private one for their own enjoyment, Carson's Hill would be the place. It fitted—the gang of juvenile delinquents who are compelled to burn down the school, desecrate the chapel, stab to death the mother image in some innocent old woman who just happened to walk by at the wrong moment—wild destruction of a place or symbol that represented inner travail.

I was moving quickly through the crowd, the silent crowd. There was only a low grumble as I pushed somebody aside so I could get through. Near the edge I heard her voice come through the speakers, low and thrilling, dulcet sweet.

"My children," she began, "tonight's meeting must be brief. This is farewell, and I must not burden you with my grief at leaving you . . ."

I made the yard gate and ran down the street to where my goonie team still waited beside the rickashaw.

"Let's get out to Carson's Hill as fast as we can," I said to the team. In the darkness I caught the answering flash of their eyes, and

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heard the soft sound of harness being slipped over pelt. By the time I was seated, they were away in a smart mile-covering trot.

Miriam Wellman had been damned sure of herself, burning her bridges behind her while Hest and his rowdies were still on the loose, probably up there on Carson's Hill, torturing that goonie for their own amusement. I wondered how in hell she thought that was taking care of anything.

The road that led toward home was smooth enough for a while, but it got rough as soon as the goonies took the trail that branched off toward Carson's Hill. It was a balmy night, warm and sweet with the fragrance of pal tree blossoms. The sky was full of stars, still close, not yet faded in the light of the first moon that was now rising in the East. It was a world of beauty, and the only flaw it in was Man.

In the starlight, and now the increasing moonlight Carson's Hill began to stand forth, blocking off the stars to the west. In the blackness of that silhouette, near its crest, I seemed to catch a hint of reddish glow—a fire had been built in the ampitheatre.

Farther along, where the steep climb began, I spoke softly to the team, had them pull off the path into a small grove of pal trees. From here on the path wound around and took forever to get to the top. I could make better time with a stiff climb on foot. Avoid sentries, too—assuming they'd had enough sense to post any.

The team seemed uneasy, as if they sensed my tenseness, or knew what was happening up there on top. We understood them so little, how could we know what the goonie sensed? But as always they were obedient, anxious to please man, only to please him, whatever he wanted. I told them to conceal themselves and wait for me. They would.

I left the path and struck off in a straight line toward the top. The going wasn't too bad, at first. Wide patches of no trees, no undergrowth, open to the moonlight. I worried about it a little. To anyone watching from above I would be a dark spot moving against the light-colored grass. But I gambled they would be too intent with their pleasures, or would be watching only the path, which entered the grove from the other side of the hill.

Now I was high enough to look off to the south-east where Libo City lay. I saw the lights of the mainstreet, tiny as a relief map. I did not see the bright spot of the platform on the landing field. Too far away to distinguish, something blocking my view at that point . . . or was the meeting already over and the landing field dark?

I plunged into a thicket of vines and brush. The advantage of con-

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cealment was offset by slower climbing. But I had no fear of losing my way so long as I climbed. The glow of light was my beacon, but not a friendly one. It grew stronger as I climbed, and once there was a shower of sparks wafting upward as though somebody had disturbed the fire. Disturbed it, in what way?

I realized I was almost running up the hill and gasping for breath. The sound of my feet was a loud rustle of leaves, and I tried to go more slowly, more quietly as I neared the top.

At my first sight of flickering raw flame through the trunks of trees, I stopped.

I had no plan in mind. I wasn't fool enough to think I could plow in there and fight a whole gang of crazed sadists. A fictional hero would do it, of course—and win without mussing his pretty hair. I was no such hero, and nobody knew it better than I.

What would I do then? Try it anyway? At my age? Already panting for breath from my climb, from excitement? Maybe from a fear that I wouldn't admit? Or would I simply watch, horror-stricken, as witnesses on Earth had watched crazed mobs from time immemorial? Surely man could have found some way to leave his barbarisms back on Earth, where they were normal.

I didn't know. I felt compelled to steal closer, to see what was happening. Was this, too, a part of the human pattern? The horror-stricken witness, powerless to turn away, powerless to intervene, appalled at seeing the human being in the raw? To carry the scar of it in his mind all the rest of his days?

Was this, too, a form of participation? And from it a kind of inverse satisfaction of superiority to the mob?

What the hell. I pushed my way on through the last thickets, on toward the flames. I didn't know I was sobbing deep, wracking coughs, until I choked on a hiccough. Careful MacPherson! You're just asking for it. How would you like to join the goonie?

As it was, I almost missed the climax. Five minutes more and I would have found only an empty glade, a fire starting to burn lower for lack of wood, trampled grass between the crevices of flat granite stones.

Now from where I hid I saw human silhouettes limned against the flames, moving in random patterns. I drew closer and closer, dodging from tree to tree. Softly and carefully I crept closer, until the blackness of silhouette gave way to the color-tones of firelight on flesh. I could hear the hoarseness of their passion drunk voices, and crept still closer until I could distinguish words.

Yet in this, as in the equally barbaric meeting I'd left, something

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was missing. There wasn't an experienced lyncher among them. At least Personnel had had the foresight to refuse the applications from areas where lynching was an endemic pleasure. The right words, at the right time, would have jelled thought and action into ultimate sadism, but as it was, the men here milled about uncertainly—driven by the desire, the urge, but not knowing quite how to go about it . . . the adolescent in his first sex attempt.

"Well let's do something," one voice came clearly. "If hanging's too good for a goonie that tries to be a man, how about burning?"

"Let's skin him alive and auction off the pelt. Teach these goonies a lesson."

I saw the goonie then, spread-eagled on the ground. He did not struggle. He had not fought, nor tried to run away. Naturally; he was a goonie. I felt a wave of relief, so strong it was a sickness. That, too. If he had fought or tried to run away, they wouldn't have needed an experienced lyncher to tell them what to do. The opposition would have been enough to turn them into a raving mob, all acting in one accord.

And then I knew. I knew the answer to the puzzle that had tortured me for twenty years.

But I was not to think about it further then, for the incredible happened. She must have left only moments after I did, and I must have been hesitating there, hiding longer than I'd realized. In any event, Miriam Wellman, in her shimmering robe, walking as calmly as if she were out for an evening stroll, now came into the circle of firelight.

"Boys! Boys!" she said commandingly, chiding, sorrowfully, and without the slightest tremor of uncertainty in her voice. "Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? Teasing that poor animal that way? Cutting up the minute my back is turned? And I trusted you, too!"

I gasped at the complete inadequacy, the unbelievable stupidity of the woman, unprotected, walking into the middle of it and speaking as if to a roomful of kindergarten kids. But these were not kids! They were grown human males in a frenzy of lust for killing. Neither fire hoses, nor tear gas, nor machinegun bullets had stopped such mobs on Earth.

But she had stopped them. I realized they were standing there, shock still, agape with consternation. For a tense ten seconds they stood there frozen in tableau, while Miss Wellman clucked her tongue and looked about with exasperation. Slowly the tableau began to melt, amost imperceptibly at first—the droop of a shoulder, the eyes that stared at the ground, one sheepish, foolish grin, a toe that made little circles on the rock. One, on the outskirts, tried to melt back into the darkness.

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"Oh no you don't, Peter Blackburn!" Miss Wellman snapped at him, as if he were four years old. "You come right back here and untie this poor goonie. Shame on you. You, too, Carl Hest. The very idea!"

One by one she called them by name, whipped them with phrases used on small children—but never on grown men.

She was a professional, she knew what she was doing. And she had been right in what she had told me—if I'd butted in, there might have been incalculable damage done.

Force would not have stopped them. It would have egged them on, increased the passion. They would have gloried in resisting it. It would have given meaning to a meaningless thing. The resistance would have been a part, a needed part, and given them the triumph of rape instead of the frustration of encountering motionless, indifferent acceptance.

But she had shocked them out of it, by not recognizing their grown maleness, their lustful dangerousness. She saw them as no more than naughty children—and they became that, in their own eyes.

I watched them in a kind of daze, while, in their own daze, they untied the goonie, lifted him carefully as if to be sure they didn't hurt him. The goonie looked at them from his great glowing green eyes without fear, without wonder. He seemed only to say that whatever man needed of him, man could have.

With complete casualness, Miss Wellman stepped forward and took the goonie's hand. She led it to her own rickashaw at the edge of the grove. She spoke to her team, and without a backward look she drove away.

Even in this she had shown her complete mastery of technique. With no show of hurry, she had driven away before they had time to remember they were determined, angry men.

They stared after her into the darkness. Then meekly, tamely, without looking at one another, gradually even as if repelled by the presence of one another, they moved out of the grove toward their own rickashaws on the other side of the grove near the path.

The party was over.

For those who find violent action a sufficient end in itself, the yarn is over. The goonie was rescued and would be returned to me. The emotional Typhoid Marys had been isolated and would be shipped back to Earth where the disease was endemic and would not be noticed. Paul Tyler would be acceptable again in the company of men. Miriam Wellman would soon be on her way to her next assignment of trouble-shooting, a different situa-

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tion calling for techniques which would be different but equally effective. The Company was saved some trouble that could have become unprofitable. Libo would return to sanity and reason, the tenderfeet would gradually become Liboans, insured against the spread of disease by their innoculation. . . . The mob unrest and disorders were finished.

But the yarn was not over for me. What purpose to action if, beyond giving some release to the manic depressive, it has no meaning? In the middle of it all, the answer to the goonie puzzle had hit me. But the answer solved nothing; it served only to raise much larger questions.

At home that night I slept badly, so fitfully that Ruth grew worried and asked if there was anything she could do.

"The goonie," I blurted out as I lay and stared into the darkness. "That first hunting party. If the goonie had run away, they would have given those hunters, man, the chase he needed for sport. After a satisfactory chase, man would have caught and killed the goonie down to the last one. If it had hid, it would have furnished another kind of chase, the challenge of finding it, until one by one all would have been found out, and killed. If it had fought, it would have given man his thrill of battle, and the end would have been the goonie's death."

Ruth lay there beside me, saying nothing, but I knew she was not asleep.

"I've always thought the goonie had no sense of survival," I said. "But it took the only possible means of surviving. Only by the most complete compliance with man's wishes could it survive. Only by giving no resistance in any form. How did it know, Ruth? How did it know? First contact, no experience with man. Yet it knew. Not just some old wise ones knew, but all knew instantly, down to the tinest cub. What kind of intelligence—?"

"Try to sleep, dear," Ruth said tenderly. "Try to sleep now. We'll talk about it tomorrow. You need your rest. . . ."

We did not talk about it the next day. The bigger questions it opened up for me had begun to take form. I couldn't talk about them. I went about my work in a daze, and in the later afternoon, compelled, drawn irresistibly, I asked the goonie team to take me again to Carson's Hill. I knew that there I would be alone.

The glade was empty, the grasses were already lifting themselves upright again. The fire had left a patch of ashes and blackened rock. It would be a long time before that scar was gone, but it would go eventually. The afternoon suns sent shafts of light down through the trees, and I found the spot that had been my favorite

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twenty years ago when I had looked out over a valley and resolved somehow to own it.

I sat down and looked out over my valley and should have felt a sense of achievement, of satisfaction that I had managed to do well. But my valley was like the ashes of the burned-out fire. For what had I really achieved?

Survival? What had I proved, except that I could do it? In going out to the stars, in conquering the universe, what was man proving, except that he could do it? What was he proving that the primitive tribesman on Earth hadn't already proved when he conquered the jungle enough to eat without being eaten?

Was survival the end, and all? What about all these noble aspirations of man? How quickly he discarded them when his survival was threatened. What were they then but luxuries of a self-adulation which he practiced only when he could safely afford it?

How was man superior to the goonie? Because he conquered it? Had he conquered it? Through my ranching, there were many more goonies on Libo now than when man had first arrived. The goonie did our work, we slaughtered it for our meat. But it multiplied and throve.

The satisfactions of pushing other life forms around? We could do it. But wasn't it a pretty childish sort of satisfaction? Nobody knew where the goonie came from, there was no evolutionary chain to account for him here on Libo; and the pal tree on which he depended was unlike any other kind of tree on Libo. Those were important reasons for thinking I was right. Had the goonie once conquered the universe, too? Had it, too, found it good to push other life forms around? Had it grown up with the universe, out of its childish satisfactions, and run up against the basic question: Is there really anything beyond survival, itself, and if so, what? Had it found an answer, an answer so magnificent that it simply didn't matter that man worked it, slaughtered it, as long as he multiplied it?

And would man, someday, too, submit willingly to a new, arrogant, brash young life-form—in the knowledge that it really didn't matter? But what was the end result of knowing nothing mattered except static survival?

To hell with the problems of man, let him solve them. What about yourself, MacPherson? What are you trying to avoid? What won't you face?

To the rest of man the goonie is an unintelligent animal, fit only for labor and food. But not to me. If I am right, the rest of man is wrong—and I must believe I am right. I *know*.

And tomorrow is slaughtering day.

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I can forgive the psychologist his estimation of the goonie. He's trapped in his own rigged slot machine. I can forgive the Institute, for it is, must be, dedicated to the survival, the superiority, of man. I can forgive the Company—it must show a profit to its stockholders or go out of business. All survival, all survival. I can forgive man, because there's nothing wrong with wanting to survive, to prove that you can do it.

And it would be a long time before man had solved enough of his whole survival problem to look beyond it.

But I had looked beyond it. Had the goonie, the alien goonie, looked beyond it? And seen what? What had it seen that made anything we did to it not matter?

We could, in clear conscience, continue to use it for food only so long as we judged it by man's own definitions, and thereby found it unintelligent. But I knew now that there was something beyond man's definition.

All right. I've made my little pile. I can retire, go away. Would that solve anything? Someone else would simply take my place. Would I become anything more than the dainty young thing who lifts a bloody dripping bite of steak to her lips, but shudders at the thought of killing anything? Suppose I started all over, on some other planet, forgot the goonie, wiped it out of my mind, as humans do when they find reality unpleasant. Would that solve anything? If there are definitions of intelligence beyond man's own, would I not merely be starting all over with new scenes, new creatures, to reach the same end?

Suppose I deadened my thought to reality, as man is wont to do? Could that be done? Could the question once asked, and never answered, be forgotten? Surely other men have asked the question: What is the purpose of survival if there is no purpose beyond survival?

Have any of the philosophies ever answered it? Yes, we've speculated on the survival of the ego after the flesh, that ego so overpoweringly precious to us that we cannot contemplate its end—but survival of ego to what purpose?

Was this the fence across our path? The fence so alien that we tore ourselves to pieces trying to get over it, go through it?

Had the goonies found a way around it, an answer so alien to our kind of mind that what we did to them, how we used them, didn't matter—so long as we did not destroy them all? I had said they did not initiate, did not create, had no conscience—not by *man's* standards. But by their own? How could I know? How could I know?

Go out to the stars, young man, and grow up with the universe!

All right! We're out there!

What now, little man?

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You can't see air, or taste it, or hold it between thumb and forefinger—but looked at through the eyes of the good doctor, it is substantial, complicated, and fascinating.

THIN AIR

by Isaac Asimov

EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE IS NOW going through a period of scientific importance and prominence. To put it as colorfully (and yet as honestly) as possible, it is all the scientific rage.

Once before in scientific history, Earth's atmosphere passed through a period of glamor. Let me tell you about that (or perhaps I should say, try and stop me) before I get to the current period.

To begin with, in ancient Greek times, air had all the dignity of an "element"—one of the abstract substances out of which the universe was composed. According to Aristotle, the universe, to begin with, was composed of "earth," "water," "air," and "fire," in four concentric shells with "earth" innermost and "fire" outermost.

In modern terms, "earth" is equivalent to the lithosphere, the solid body of the planet, itself. "Water" is the hydrosphere, or ocean; and "air" is the atmosphere. "Fire" is less obvious, it being so high up as to be ordinarily imperceptible to human senses. However, storms roiled the sphere of "fire" and made fragments of it visible to us as lightning.

Even the sphere of "fire" reached only to the Moon. From the Moon outward, there was a fifth and heavenly "element," like none of those on our imperfect earth. Aristotle called it "ether." Medieval scholars called it "fifth element", but did so in Latin, so that the word came out "quintes-

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sence." That word survives today, meaning the purest and most essential part of anything.

Such a theory about the structure of the universe presented early thinkers with few problems about the air. For instance, did the atmosphere ever come to an end as one went upward? Sure it did. It came to an end at the point where the sphere of fire began.

You see, there was always *something* in the Aristotelian view. Just as earth gave way to water and water to air, with no gap between, so air gave way to fire and fire to ether. There was never *nothing*. As Aristotle said, "Nature abhors a vacuum."

Did the atmosphere have weight? Obviously not. You didn't feel any weight, did you? If a rock fell on you or a bucket's worth of water, you would feel the weight. But there's no feeling of weight to the air. Aristotle had an explanation for this. "Earth" and "water" had a natural tendency to move downward, as far as they could, toward the center of the universe (*i.e.* the center of the Earth).

"Air," on the other hand, had a natural tendency to move upward as anyone could plainly see. (Blow bubbles under water and *watch* them move upwards—not that Aristotle would appeal to experiment, believing as he did that the light of reason was sufficient to penetrate the secrets of nature.) Since air lifted upward, it had no weight downward.

Aristotle flourished about 330 B.C. and his views were Gospel for a long time.

Curtain falls. Two thousand years pass. Curtain rises.

Toward the end of his long and brilliant life, Galileo Galilei, the Italian scientst, grew interested in the fact that an ordinary water-pump drawing water out of a well would not lift the water any higher than about 33 feet above the natural level. This, no matter how vigorously and how pertinaciously the handle of the pump was operated.

Now people thought they knew how a pump worked. It was so designed that a tightly-fitted piston moved upward within a cylinder, creating a vacuum. Since Nature abhorred a vacuum (after all, Aristotle said so) water rushed upward to fill said vacuum and was trapped by a one-way valve. The process was repeated and repeated, more and more water rushed upward until it poured out the spout. Theoretically, this should go on forever, the water rising higher and higher as long as you worked the pump.

Then why didn't the water rise more than 33 feet above its natural level? Galileo shook his head, and never did find an answer. He

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muttered gruffly that apparently Nature abhorred a vacuum only up to 33 feet and recommended that his pupil, Evangelista Torricelli, look into the matter.

In 1643, the year after Galileo's death, Torricelli did that. It occurred to him that what lifted the water wasn't a fit of emotion on the part of Dame Nature, but the very unemotional weight of air pressing down on the water and forcing it upward into a vacuum (which would ordinarily be filled with a balancing weight of air). Water could not be forced higher than 33 feet because a column of water 33 feet high pressed down as hard as did the entire atmosphere, so that there was balance. Even if a complete vacuum were pulled over the water, so that air down at well-water level pushed the column upward without any back air-pressure, the weight of the water itself was enough to balance the total air-pressure.

How to test this? If you could start with a column of water, say, 40 feet long, it should sink until the 33-feet level was reached. A 40-foot column of water would have more pressure at the bottom than the entire atmosphere. But how handle forty feet of water?

Well, then, suppose you used a liquid denser than water. In that case, a shorter column would suffice to balance air's pressure. The densest liquid Torricelli knew was mercury, which is about 13½ times as dense as water. Since 33 divided by 13½ is about 2½ feet, a column of 30 inches of mercury should balance the air pressure.

Torricelli filled a tube (closed at one end and a yard long) with mercury, put his thumb over the open end and tipped it into an open container of mercury. If the air had no weight, it would not press on the exposed mercury level in the container. All the mercury in the tube would therefore pour out.

The mercury in the tube started pouring out, to be sure, but only to the extent of a few inches. Fully 30 inches of mercury remained standing, supported by nothing, apparently. It was either magic or else Aristotle was wrong and air had weight. There was no real choice—air *must* have weight. Thus, the first glamorous period of the atmosphere had begun.

Torricelli had invented the barometer, an instrument still used today to measure air-pressure as "so many inches of mercury." Furthermore, in the upper part of the tube, in the few inches that had been vacated by the mercury, there was a vacuum, filled with nothing but some mercury vapor and darned little of that. It is called a "Toricellian vacuum" to this day and was the first decent vacuum ever formed. It showed definitely that Nature didn't care, one way or the other, for vacuums.

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In 1650, Otto von Guericke, who happened to be mayor of the German city of Magdeburg, went a step further. He invented an air-pump which could pump air out of an enclosure, forming a harder and harder vacuum; *i.e.*, one that grew more and more vacuous.

Von Guericke then demonstrated the power of air pressure in a dramatic way. He had two metal hemispheres made which ended in flat rims that could be greased and stuck together. If this were done, the heavy hemispheres fell apart of themselves. There was nothing to hold them together.

But one of the hemispheres had a valved nozzle to which an air pump could be affixed. Von Guericke put the hemispheres together and pumped the air out of them, then closed the valve. Now the weight of the atmosphere was pressing the hemispheres together and there was no equivalent pressure within.

How strong was this air pressure? Well, publicity-wise von Guericke attached a team of horses to one hemisphere by a handle he had thoughtfully provided upon it and another team to the other hemisphere. With half the town of Magdeburg watching open-mouthed, he had the horses strain uselessly in opposite directions to part the hemispheres.

The thin air about us which "obviously" weighed nothing, did indeed weigh plenty. And when that weight was put to use, two teams of horses couldn't counter it.

Von Guericke released the horses, opened the valve, and the hemispheres fell open by themselves. It was as dramatic an experiment as Galileo's supposed tossing of two balls of different mass off the Tower of Pisa, and what's more, von Guericke's experiment really happened. (They don't make mayors like that anymore.)

Since the atmosphere has weight, there could be only so much of it and no more. There could be only enough of it to allow a column of air (from sea-level to the very tip-top), with a cross-sectional area of one square inch, to weigh 14.7 pounds. If the atmosphere were as dense all the way up, as it is at sea-level, a column just five miles high would have the necessary weight.

But of course, air isn't equally dense all the way up.

In the 1650's a British scientist, Robert Boyle, having read of von Guericke's experiments set about to study the properties of air more thoroughly. He found it to be compressible.

That is, if he trapped a sample of air in the short closed half of a U-tube by pouring mercury into the long, open half, the trapped air contracted in volume (*i.e.*, was compressed) until it had built

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up an internal pressure that balanced the head of mercury. As the mercury was added, the momentum of its fall added a bit of pressure to that of its weight alone and the column of mercury jiggled up and down as the trapped air compressed and expanded like a spring. The English scientist, Robert Hooke, had just been reporting on the behavior of actual springs and since the trapped air behaved analogously, Boyle called it "the spring of the air."

If, now, Boyle poured additional mercury into the U-tube, the trapped air decreased further in volume until the internal pressure had increased to the point where the additional weight of mercury could be supported. Furthermore, Boyle made actual measurements and found that if the pressure on the trapped air were doubled, its volume was halved; if the pressure were tripled, the volume was reduced to one-third . . . and so on. (This is one way of stating what is now called "Boyle's Law.")

This was a remarkable discovery, for liquids and solids did not behave in this way. Boyle's work marks the beginning of the scientific study of the properties of gases which, in a hundred years, produced the atomic theory and revolutionized chemistry.

Since air is compressible, the lowest regions of the atmosphere which bear all the weight of all the air above, must be most compressed; and as one moves upward in the atmosphere, each successive sample of air at greater and greater heights has less atmosphere above it, is subjected to a smaller weight of air, and is therefore less compressed.

It follows that a given number of molecules occupy more space ten miles up than they do at sea-level, and more space still twenty miles up, and more space still thirty miles up, and so on, indefinitely. From this, it would seem that the atmosphere must also stretch up indefinitely. True, there's less and less of it as you go up, but that less and less is taking up more and more room.

In fact, it can be calculated that, if the atmosphere were at the sea-level average of temperature throughout its height, air pressure would be reduced tenfold for every twelve miles we travel upward. In other words, since the air pressure is 30 inches of mercury at sea-level, it would be 3 inches of mercury at a height of 12 miles, 0.3 inches of mercury at 24 miles, 0.03 inches of mercury at 36 miles and so on. Even at a height of 108 miles, there would still be, by this accounting, 0.000000003 inches of mercury of pressure. This doesn't sound like much, but it means that six million tons of air would be included in the portion of the atmosphere higher than 100 miles above the earth's surface.

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Of course, the atmosphere is *not* the same temperature throughout. It is common knowledge that mountain slopes are always cooler than the valley below. There is also no denying the fact that high mountains are perpetually snow-covered at the top, even through the summer and even in the tropics.

Presumably, then, the temperature of the atmosphere lowered with height and, it seemed likely, did so in a smooth fall all the way up. This spoiled the simple theory about the rate of decline of density with height, but it didn't affect the theory that the atmosphere went remarkably high. Once astronomers started looking, they found ample evidence of that.

For instance, visible meteor trails have been placed (by triangulation) as high as 100 miles. That means that even at 100 miles, then, there is enough atmosphere to friction tiny bits of fast-moving metals to incandescence.

Furthermore, aurora borealis (caused by the glowing of thin wisps of gas as the result of bombardment by particles from outer space) have been detected as high as 600 miles.

However, how was one to get details on the upper atmosphere? Particularly one would want to know the exact way in which temperature and pressure fell off with height. As early as 1648, the French scientist, Blaise Pascal, had sent a friend up a mountain side with a barometer to check the fall of air-pressure, but then, how high are the mountains?

The highest mountains easily accessible to the Europeans of the 17th century were the Alps, the tallest peaks of which extended 3 miles into the air. Even the highest mountains of all, the Himalayas, were only double that. And then, how could you be sure that the air 6 miles high in the Himalayas was the same as the air 6 miles high over the blank and level ocean.

No, anything in the atmosphere higher than, say, a mile was attainable only in restricted portions of the globe and then with great difficulty. And anything higher than 5 or 6 miles just wasn't attainable, period. No one would ever know. No one.

So the first glamorous period of the atmosphere then came to an end.

Curtain falls. A century and a half passes. Curtain rises.

In 1782, two French brothers Joseph Michel Montgolfier and Jacques Etienne Montgolfier, lit a fire under a large light bag with an opening underneath and allowed the heated air and smoke to fill it. The hot air, being lighter than the cold air, moved upward, just as an air bubble would move upward in water. The movement carried the

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bag with it, and the first balloon had been constructed.

Within a matter of months, hydrogen replaced hot air, gondolas were added, and first animals and then men went aloft. In the next few decades, aeronautics was an established craze—a full century before the Wright Brothers.

Within a year of the first balloon, an American named John Jeffries went up in one, taking with him a barometer and other instruments, plus provisions to collect air at various heights. The atmosphere, miles high, was thus suddenly and spectacularly made available to science, and the second glamorous period had begun.

By 1804, the French scientist Joseph Louis Gay-Lussac had gone up nearly 4½ miles in a balloon, a height considerably greater than that of the highest peak of the Alps, and brought down air collected there.

It was, however, difficult to go much higher than that, because aeronauts even then suffered from the inconvenient necessity of breathing. In 1874, three men went up 6 miles—the height of Mt. Everest—but only one survived. In 1892, the practice of sending up instrumented, unmanned balloons was inaugurated.

The most important purpose of the early experiments was the measurement of the temperature at high altitudes, and by the 1890's some startling results showed up. The temperature did indeed drop steadily as one went upward, until at a height somewhat greater than that of Mt. Everest, the temperature of —70° F. was reached. Then, for some miles higher, *there were no further temperature changes.*

The French meteorologist, Leon P. Teisserenc de Bort, one of the discoverers of this fact, therefore divided the atmosphere into two layers. The lower layer, where there was temperature change, was characterized by rising and falling air currents that kept that region of the atmosphere churned up and produced clouds and all the changing weather phenomena with which we are familiar. This is the *troposphere* ("the sphere of change").

The height at which the temperature fall ceased was the *tropopause* ("end of change") and above it was the region of constant temperature, a place of no currents of churning, where the air lay quietly and (Teisserenc de Bort thought) in layers, with the lighter gases floating on top. Perhaps the earth's atmospheric supplies of helium and hydrogen were to be found up there, floating on the denser gases below. He called this upper layer the *stratosphere* ("sphere of layers").

The tropopause is about ten miles above sea-level at the equator and only five miles above at the

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poles. The stratosphere extends from the tropopause up to about sixteen miles. There, where the temperature starts changing again, is the *stratopause*.

About 75% of the total air mass of the earth exists within the troposphere and another 13% is in the stratosphere. Together, troposphere and stratosphere, with 98% of the total air mass between them, make up the "lower atmosphere." But it is the 2% above the stratosphere, the "upper atmosphere", which gained particular prominence as the twentieth century wore on.

In the 1930's, ballooning entered a new era. Balloons of polyethylene plastic were lighter, stronger, less permeable to gas than the old silken balloons (cheaper, too). They could reach heights of more than twenty miles. Sealed gondolas were used and the balloonists carried their own air supply with them.

In this way, manned balloons reached the stratosphere and beyond. Russian balloonists brought back samples of stratospheric air and no helium or hydrogen was present; just the usual oxygen and nitrogen. (We now know that the atmosphere is largely oxygen and nitrogen all the way up.)

Airplanes with sealed cabins were flying the stratosphere, too, and toward the end of World War II, the *jet streams* were discovered. These were two strong air currents girdling the earth, and moving from east to west at 100 to 500 miles per hour at about tropopause heights, one in the North Temperate Zone and one in the South Temperate. Apparently, they are of particular importance in weather forecasting, for they wriggle about quite a bit and the weather pattern follows their wriggling.

After World War II, rockets began going up and sending down data. The region above the stratosphere was more and more thoroughly explored. Thus, it was found that from the stratopause to a height of about 35 miles, the temperature *rises*, reaching a high of —55° F. before dropping once more to —100° F. at a height of about 50 miles. Above that there is a large and steady rise to temperatures that are estimated to be about 2200° F. at a height of 300 miles and are probably higher still at greater heights.

The region of rising, then falling, temperature, from 16 to 50 miles is now called the *mesosphere* ("the middle sphere") and the region of minimum temperature that tops it is the *mesopause*. The mesosphere contains virtually all the mass of the upper atmosphere, about 2% of all the atmosphere. Above the mesopause, only a few thousandths of a percent of the atmosphere remain.

These last wisps are, however, anything but insignificant, and

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they are divided into two regions. From 50 to 100 miles is the region where meteor trails are visible. This is the *thermosphere* ("sphere of heat" because of the rising temperatures) and is topped by the *thermopause,* though that is *not* the "end of heat." Some authorities run the thermosphere up to 200 or even 300 miles.

Above the thermopause is the region of the atmosphere which is too thin to heat meteors to incandescence but which can still support the aurora borealis. This is the *exosphere* ("outside sphere").

There is no clear upper boundary of the exosphere. Actually, the exosphere just thins and fades into interplanetary space (which is *not,* of course, a complete vacuum). Some try to judge the "end of the atmosphere" by the manner in which the molecules of the air hit one another.

Here at sea-level, molecules are crowded so closely together that any one molecule will only be able to travel a few millionths of an inch (on the average) before striking another. The air acts as a continuous medium, for that reason.

At a height of ten miles, the molecules have so thinned out that they may travel a ten-thousandth of an inch before colliding. At a height of 70 miles, they will travel a yard and a half, and at 150 miles, 370 yards before colliding. At a height of several hundred miles, collisions become so rare that you can ignore them, and the atmosphere begins to behave like a collection of independent particles.

(If you have ever been part of the New Year's Eve crowd in Times Square, and have also walked a lonely city street at 3 A.M., you have an intuitive notion of the difference between particles composing an apparently continuous medium and particles in isolation.)

The point where the atmosphere stops behaving as a continuous medium and begins to act as a collection of independent particles may be considered the *exopause,* the end of the atmosphere. This has been placed at heights varying from 600 to 1,000 miles by different authorities.

The practical importance to us of the upper atmosphere is that it bears the brunt of the various bombardments from outer space, blunting them and shielding us.

For one thing, there is the Sun's heat. The Sun emits photons with the energy one would expect of a body with a surface temperature of 10,000° F. These photons do not lose energy as they travel through space and they strike the atmosphere in full force. Fortunately, the sun radiates them in all directions and only a billionth or so are intercepted by our own planet.

Still, when one of the photons strikes a molecule at the edge of

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the atmosphere and is absorbed, that molecule may find itself possessed of a Sun-type temperature of 10,000 F. Only a small proportion of the molecules of Earth's atmosphere are so heated, and slowly, by collision with other molecules below, the energy is shared so that the temperature drops to bearable levels as one descends.

(The high temperatures of the exosphere and thermosphere are an odd echo of the Aristotelian sphere of "fire." You may also be wondering how rockets can pass through the exosphere, if it has a temperature in the thousands of degrees, without being destroyed. There you run up against the difference between temperature and heat and I'm reserving that for another article.)

Of course, the high temperature of the outermost atmosphere has its effects on the molecules that compose it. Oxygen and nitrogen molecules, shaken by this temperature and exposed to the bombardment of high energy particles beside, break up into individual atoms. (If the free atoms sink down to positions where less energy is available, they recombine, so no permanent damage is done.)

People have speculated whether ramjets might not make use of these free atoms to navigate the exosphere. If enough could be gathered and compressed (and that is the hard part), the energy delivered per weight by their reunion to form molecules would be much higher than the energy delivered per weight by the combination of conventional fuel with oxygen, ozone or fluorine.

Furthermore, the supply would be inexhaustible, since the atoms, once combined into molecules, would be expelled out the rear where the sun's energy would promptly split them into atoms again. In effect, such a ramjet would be running on something one tiny step removed from solar energy.

The bombardment of particles from space also succeeds in damaging individual atoms or molecules, knocking off one or more planetary electrons, and leaving behind charged atom-fragments called *ions*. Enough ions are formed in the exosphere to produce the glow called the aurorae.

In the denser air of the thermosphere, there are more or less permanent layers of ions at different heights. These first made themselves known by the fact that they reflect certain radio waves. In 1902, Oliver Heaviside of England and Arthur Edwin Kennelly of the United States discovered (independently) the lowest of these layers, about 70 miles high. It is called the *Kennelly-Heaviside Layer* in their honor.

Higher layers (at about 120 miles and 200 miles) were discovered in 1927 by the British

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physicist, Edward Victor Appleton, and these are called the *Appleton layers*. Because of these various layers of ions, the thermosphere is frequently called the *ionosphere*, and its upper boundary the *ionopause* (though that is not the "end of ions" anymore than it is the "end of heat").

Nowadays, the layers have received objective letters. The Kennelly-Heaviside layer is the *E layer*, while the Appleton layers are the F_1 *layer* and F_2 *layer*. Between the F_1 layer and the E layer is the *E region* and below the E layer is the *D region*.

Lower in the atmosphere, down in the mesosphere, the ultra-violet of the Sun is still capable of inducing chemical reactions that do not ordinarily proceed spontaneously at sea-level. It is possible to send chemicals up there and watch things happen. The most important point, though, is that something happens to a chemical already present there. Ordinary oxygen molecules of the mesosphere (made up of two oxygen atoms apiece) are converted into the more energetic ozone molecules (made up of three oxygen atoms apiece).

The ozone is continually changing back to oxygen while the forever incoming ultraviolet is continually forming more ozone. An equilibrium is reached and a permanent layer of ozone exists about 15 miles above the earth's surface. This is fortunate for us, since the maintenance of the ozone layer continually absorbs the sun's hard ultra-violet which, if it were allowed to reach the earth's surface unabsorbed, would be fatal for most forms of land life in short order.

Because of the chemical reactions occurring in the mesosphere, it is sometimes called the *chemosphere* (and its upper boundary, the *chemopause*.) As for the ozone layer itself that is sometimes referred to as the *ozonosphere*.

So there you have the steps. From Aristotle's undifferentiated "air" through one period of scientific glamor to Boyle's smoothly thinning atmosphere; then through another period of scientific glamor to the modern layers upon layers of air, with changing properties.

Next step (now begun): the investigation of *cis-Lunar space* (the space "this side of the Moon") which has already yielded the surprising knowledge of the existence of the Van Allen radiation belts—but that's for another time.

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Gerard Neyroud, a retired English newspaperman, here sketches a sardonic picture of Earth's behavior upon encountering evidence that there is life on Venus. (Later in this issue, Robert Nathan offers an altogether different approach to the subject.)

The Terra-Venusian War of 1979

by Gerard E. Neyroud

THERE ARE STILL A FEW STIFF-MINDED people who refuse to admit that Venus attacked the earth in 1979. People, mark you, who lived through the war, heard the nuclear blasts shattering the order of space, saw the golden legions of Venus advancing relentlessly through the void, witnessed the prodigious aftermath of the invasion. Nothing but imagination, the non-believers say; a world-wide hallucination instilled into the minds of men by the frenzied shoutings of press, television and radio. The skeptics cannot very well deny the extraordinary effects of the Venusian incursion—those effects still linger today, though fast fading—so they glibly ascribe them to earthborn causes.

I am not an imaginative person; I am a retired businessman known to my family and friends as a confirmed cynic, and I say that the skeptics are egregiously wrong. Furthermore I deny that the press and the airnews people overplayed the momentous happenings of the spring of 1979. There was no need for synthetic sensationalism; the genuine article was wild enough. I should know; I was in on the Terra-Venusian affair from its very beginning.

Perhaps I should not have used the words "attack" and "war," but there are no other terms in any earth language to describe the happenings. "Extraterrestrial Intervention" would be nearer the mark, but it is a clumsy phrase and meaningless without the facts.

Here, then, are the facts:

The first inkling of the coming storm was a little story in the Washington Starpost of April 1, 1979. My clipping file (I collect clippings) is on my desk and I can quote the story in full:

VENUS SIGNALS
BAFFLE D.C. ASTRONOMER

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The appearance of a large number of golden globes in the vicinity of the cloud-veiled planet Venus was reported here today by Carl Maxner, noted Washington astronomer. The globes, presumably of gaseous origin, appear to be emanating from the surface of the mystery plannet at regularly spaced intervals, Maxner said.

Using an "astrophotonic scanner" of his own design and construction, the astronomer claims to have penetrated for the first time the dense atmospheric layer that hitherto has shrouded the actual surface of Venus from human observation. Maxner offers no explanation of the phenomenon, but thinks that the regularity with which the globes appear and their orderly dispersal could indicate the presence on our sister planet of a high order of intelligence. The globes will be no threat to the earth, Maxner said. Venus, at its closest approach, is twenty-three million miles away, he pointed out, and no gas bubble, however huge, could traverse even a minute fraction of that distance without breaking up.

The inevitable refutation came the following day in an Associated Press despatch from the Palomar Observatory high in the Californian Sierras. It was headed SCIENTIST SCOFFS AT VENUS GLOBES, and quoted Professor Amos Higginbotham, astrophysicist at the Observatory, as declaring:

> The Washington report that large golden globes were issuing from the planet Venus is completely nonsensical. Our giant telescope, incidentally the largest in the world, has failed to disclose anything that would even remotely confirm the claims of this self-styled astronomer. The story is unworthy of serious consideration.

On the same day the New York Daily Mirage, true to type, invested the story with a sex angle:

> SAYS VENUS BLOWING BUBBLES
>
> Venus, shy damsel of the evening sky, is shrouding her lovely form with golden bubbles to ward off the naked eye of a Washington D. C. peeping tom. The naughty man who says he saw the lady in the bubble bath is Charles Mickser, amateur stargazer and lover of nature in the raw. Mackser told our inquiring reporter today that the bubbles are bright gold and very large, which is fortunate for Venus, who is quite a big girl herself. Muckser abruptly terminated the interview when it was suggested that the star in his eye might reside on the top floor of the Shoreham Hotel.

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The Maxner report was given its coup-de-grace on April 4 by the New York Tribune-Times in this downcolumn story on page 7:

VENUS GLOBES SCHOOLBOY HOAX

The report that a Washington astronomer, Carl Maxner, had observed "golden globes" issuing from the surface of the planet Venus was an April Fool hoax perpetrated by a schoolboy, it was revealed last night. The Washington Bureau of the Tribune-Times has ascertained that Maxner, described by another newspaper as a "noted astronomer," is a fifteen year old pupil at Washington's Northwestern High School.

Jonas Higbee, Assistant Principal of Northwestern High, told a Tribune-Times representative that Maxner had shown some slight interest in astronomy and had been permitted to construct his "astrophotonic scanner" in the school workshop. "It was strictly a Rube Goldberg job," Higbee said, "made out of bits and pieces, and I doubt if it could pick up the full moon on a clear night. Washington High frowns on hoaxes of this kind and we have been considering disciplinary action. However we understand the boy's father has already taken him in hand."

At the Maxner Home on Kalorama Road, Mrs. Bruno Maxner, the boy's mother, refused to permit her son to be interviewed. "I have sent Carl to bed," she told our reporter. "His father was much too rough with him." Replying to a further question, Mrs. Maxner said that the astrophotonic scanner had been broken.

Three days later, on April 7, the austere and unimpeachable Manchester Guardian resurrected the golden globe story in a new version that jolted the world. The Guardian's thunderclap was carried under a three-decker head on page 5 and my files, fortunately, enable me to quote it in full.

STRANGE MANIFESTATIONS ON PLANET VENUS; BRITISH ASTRONOMERS PUZZLED IS EARTH MENACED?

Perplexed astrophysicists at the Jodrell Bank Observatory near Manchester confessed today that they were nonplussed by the appearance of a cluster of spheroids of immense size on the surface of the planet Venus. The spheroids, said to be pale gold in colour, were first picked up by the Observatory's astrophotonic scanner (incidentally, the first of its kind in the world) a fortnight ago, and have since been kept under close and constant observation.

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At a hastily convoked press conference, Sir Hilary Biggleswade, K.C.B.E., F.R.A.S., President of the Royal Outer Space Society, told the assembled reporters that the mysterious spheroids are beginning to form —or, disturbing thought, are being formed into—a circle, and that the most recent observations seem to indicate that this circle is advancing steadily towards the earth.

"Our first hypothesis," Sir Henry said, "was that the spheroids were of a gaseous nature—skinless balloons, you might say—but this theory is no longer tenable. The objects, whatever they may be, are now many thousands of miles from their mother planet and are moving earthward in a space vacuum in which any such concentrations of gas would have been instantly dispersed."

Sir Henry answered in the affirmative when asked if an alternative theory had been formulated. "The spheroids could consist of captive light, or possibly captive sound, or even of a captive abstraction—though how such a phenomenon could be caused is beyond human comprehension."

Speaking with great solemnity and emphasis, the great scientist added: "The spheroids appear to be under some form of central control, and the methodic manner of their advance would seem to postulate the existence on the planet Venus of a high and very possibly malign intelligence."

He terminated the conference on a note of foreboding. "We can only wait and see, or hear—or both," he said, "and we shall not have to wait very long."

Thus Carl Maxner, the forgotten Washington boy, was vindicated.

America reacted calmly to the news from Jodrell Bank, and nowhere was there any evidence of panic. The general attitude was one of doubt of the validity of Sir Hilary Biggleswade's conclusions; it was best expressed by radio news analyst Gabriel Trumpeter, who said: "If there were anything to it we would have been told about it by our own scientists, admittedly the best in the world. We don't have to listen to foreigners."

Aging President Kenfeller, then in his fifth term, issued a brief, reassuring statement from the White House. There was absolutely no cause for alarm, the President said; he was advised that there was no evidence whatsoever of any hostile intent on the part of Venus. Our stockpile of interplanetary ballistic missiles was at its peak and the American Space Force could be depended upon to cope with any situation that might arise. "Americans may sleep peacefully in their beds."

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At his Thursday press conference, Secretary of State Righteous W. Rath issued a stern hands-off warning to Venus. America will not tolerate aggression in any form or from any source, he said. Rath announced that he was flying to the moon to investigate the situation on the spot. Reminded by a reporter that Venus was several million miles beyond the moon, the Secretary replied curtly that distance meant nothing to him.

Newspaper comment reflected the national complacency. We may disregard the Daily Mirage which, in a story headed VENUS BLOWS AWAY BUBBLES SAYS SIR BIGGLESWADE, offered sympathy to Carl Maxner for the loss of his astrophotonic scanner at this propitious moment. The more stately Washington Starpost took a middle-of-the-road course. In an editorial written entirely in Greek, the Capital daily is believed to have castigated a pinchpenny administration for failing to establish a base on the moon, which was the obvious place from which to ward off a Venusian attack. "Have we forgotten," the Starpost is thought to have said, "that the moon became American territory as far back as 1961?"

The Starpost was referring, of course, to America's first and last attempts to set foot on the moon. The first, in May 1961, was only partially successful, in that the manned rocketship missed its target by the small margin of 6,000 miles. This spaceship is still in orbit, around the Sun, but has transmitted no signals for many years and it is feared that its batteries may be dead. A bipartisan attempt to land two men on the moon in August of the same year was brilliantly successful. The spacemen, Joel C. Tagliaferro (Dem.) of Lumberton N. C. and Richard Roe (Rep.) of Albuquerque N. Mex., landed their spaceship on the shores of the Mare Nectaris, issued forth briefly to plant our flag in lunar soil, and returned hastily to their ship and to earth. Interviewed on their arrival at the Patuxent River Base on Chesapeake Bay, Tagliaferro was quoted as saying "Let the Russians have it." His fellow traveler concurred.

It was exactly a month later that Congress declared the moon to be American territory, thus opening the way to ultimate statehood. Russia protested vigorously, insisting that the United States was interfering in its internal affairs. "As is well known," the Kremlin spokesman said, "the brave Red Spaceforce has long occupied the far side of the moon, and the entire planet is now properly known as the Lunar Socialist Soviet Republic."

There Congress decided to let the matter rest; in my opinion wisely.

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In contrast to America's complacency, Britain and Western Europe received Sir Hilary Biggleswade's warning with alarm and even consternation. Public tension mounted as the Jodrell Bank findings were confirmed by the famed Greenwich Observatory, from its new home at Gurstmonceux in Sussex, and by the scientists manning the skyscanners at Pic du Midi, ten thousand feet up in the French Pyrenees, who reported that "les globules Venusiennes" were now measurably closer to earth.

In London, the tocsin was sounded by Viscount Betelgeuse (better known as Space Marshal Sir Nigel Cosmore-Gore R.S.F., F.R.O.S.S) From the plinth of the Nelson Column in Trafalgar Square, Lord Betelgeuse solemnly warned a sea of eighty-five thousand upturned faces (police estimate) that the hour of Britain's greatest ordeal was about to strike. "We do not know the nature of the peril that threatens us," he said, "but we do know that the Royal Spaceforce will not be found wanting. We will fight them in the stratosphere, we will fight them in the ionosphere, we will fight them in the troposphere. We will never surrender."

A thunderous roar of defiance mingled with cries of "good old Beetlejuice" and "oo's afraid of Venus" manifested once again the unconquerable spirit of the British.

There were similar demonstrations, less restrained for the most part, in Paris, Pampeluna, Hamburg and other cities. Riots and looting were reported from Naples and Kephalonia. Moscow preserved an enigmatic silence.

The news of Europe's growing unease was received in America with tolerant amusement. Gabriel Trumpeter, as usual, struck the keynote with his statesmanlike broadcasts. "If," he declared, "foreigners want to go into a tizzy over the wacky ideas of their half-baked scientists, it is their affair; it is certainly not ours." He had personally telephoned not only Palomar but also the Naval Observatory in Washington and the Pentagon, and all three had assured him categorically that they had no comment. The moral was clear, he told his vast audience. If Palomar had seen no Venus Globes it was because there were no Venus Globes. Europe was having nightmares. These people must be told once and for all that this time America was not going to pull their chestnuts out of the fire.

And America, obeying the President's mandate, slept peacefully in its bed.

On the morning of April 16, America rose yawning from that same peaceful bed, retrieved the newspaper from the porch, turned its face skyward for a look at the weather—and felt the icy grip of apocalyptic fear. Overhead, shim-

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mering in the bright sunlight, was an awesome circlet of golden globes.

For an eternal moment that morning there was no sound in America. All movement had ceased, the streets were empty of life, radio and television were hushed. It was as though all people everywhere were on their knees. Then, suddenly, the quiet sound came, an all-encompassing murmur compounded of the prayers of women and the deeper urgencies of men. Only the children were silent, wide-eyed and marveling, unafraid of the overwhelming glory above.

The radio returned to life and the people clustered around the little boxes as their forefathers had clustered around the hearth, reaping comfort from the radiation. "Do not panic", the little boxes were saying. "The situation is in hand. Stay Indoors. Close all doors and windows. Stay close to the inner walls. I repeat, do not panic. The Spaceforce is taking over. Trust our spacemen. DO NOT PANIC."

Listeners sensed wavering panic in the voice as it died, drowned out by the roaring fury of war. The Spaceforce screamed into the skies, jets howling, nuclears throbbing, rockets seeking out and blasting the unattainable and the unblastable. Bold watchers at the windows saw the spacecraft tear through the golden globes and turn to charge again. Then, at some unseen signal, the planes and rockets left the sky and silence again blanketed the world, and the golden globes of Venus, unharmed by the fury, floated serenely down and settled lightly on its continents and its oceans.

Television flickered into life and wavering patterns resolved into the face of the President. In every living room between Caribou and San Diego, between Seattle and Key West, Americans hungrily watched the little oblong of light and waited for guidance.

There was no anxiety in the face of the man in Washington. His lips were curled into a half-smile, the strong eyes were serene behind their eyebrow hedge. He opened his mouth to speak but no words came from the screen. Instead, the mouth remained open and twisetd into a prodigious yawn. The President of the United States had yawned in the faces of his fellow citizens. It was masterly statecraft; it was the guidance they wanted.

Americans all over the country yawned back at the President and went to bed.

The Great Sleep held Americans unconscious for a day—or a year or a decade; nobody ever knew or will ever know for how long—and set them free in a world bathed in soft golden haze. There were no golden globes; it seemed now that the globes had never been.

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The morning paper was waiting on the porch, slightly damp in the lambent air and printed on rose-pink stock, and nobody was surprised by the banner headline:

HAPPY NEW WORLD
TO ALL!

I still have a copy, browning at the edges now, of the Washington Starpost I picked up on my porch on that unforgettable morning. It is dated April 17, 1979 (there is a question-mark after the date), and it makes fascinating reading today. It told for instance that all the world had experienced the golden globes, had shared America's experience. In England the Queen had yawned too, and abolished the income tax. The newly crowned King Charles XI of France, and the other heads, crowned and uncrowned, of Europe had yawned with equally gratifying effect. The Cham of Tartary (formerly China) had yawned to the extent of dislocating his jaw, with the result that China was again sleeping its age-long sleep. The Man in the Kremlin had done more than yawn. He had beaten the Iron Curtain into tractor parts, freed the satellites (including the moon) and sent a message of brotherly love to the President and capitalists of the United States.

There were other news items of less import but equal significance. Arkansas reported the election, by unanimous vote, of a Negro governor. Reno and other separation centers told of a sensational decline in the number of divorce suits, and in Washington the Post Office Department announced with gratification that in all parts of the country dogs were fawning on mail carriers. From Ireland came the news that an heroic monument to Oliver Cromwell had been unveiled, to popular acclaim, in Dublin's Phoenix Park. And Hollywood let it be known that henceforth television shootings would be effected exclusively with cupid arrows.

It was wonderful and still is.

Over Washington the air is so clear that my son, Carl Maxner, Junior, has been making some interesting observations of the planet Venus by means of the powerful new astrophotonic scanner I gave him for Christmas. He has just told me they are fighting on Venus.

His theory, which I am inclined to accept, is that Venus sent the world its love, keeping none back for itself.

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Monsieur Duperrier would have rejoiced in the halo God had given him—had not his wife disapproved so strongly, were it less conspicuous, and if divesting himself of it had not proved so uncommonly difficult.

THE STATE OF GRACE

by Marcel Aymé

(translated by Norman Denny)

IN THE YEAR 1939 THE BEST Christian in the Rue Gabrielle, and indeed in all Montmartre, was a certain Monsieur Duperrier, a man of such piety, and uprightness and charity that God, without awaiting his death, and while he was still in the prime of life, crowned his head with a halo which never left it by day or by night. Like those in Paradise this halo, although made of some immaterial substance, manifested itself in the form of a whitish ring which looked as though it might have been cut out of fairly stiff cardboard, and shed a tender light. M Duperrier wore it gratefully, with devout thanks to Heaven for a distinction which, however, his modesty did not permit him to regard as a formal undertaking in respect of the hereafter. He would have been unquestionably the happiest of men had his wife, instead of rejoicing in this signal mark of the Divine approval, not received it with outspoken resentment and exasperation.

'Well really, upon my word,' the lady said, 'what do you think you look like going round in a thing like that, and what do you suppose the neighbours and the tradespeople will say, not to mention my cousin Léopold? I never in my life saw anything so ridiculous. You'll have the whole neighbourhood talking.'

Mme Duperrier was an admirable woman, of outstanding piety and impeccable conduct, but she had not yet understood the vanity of the things of this world. Like so many people whose aspirations to virtue are marred by a certain lack of logic, she thought it more important to be esteemed by her con-

From the book ACROSS PARIS AND OTHER STORIES *by Marcel Aymé;* © *1947 by Librarie Gallimard; published by Harper & Brothers*

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cierge than by her Creator. Her terror lest she should be questioned on the subject of the halo by one of the neighbours or by the milkman had from the very outset an embittering effect upon her. She made repeated attempts to snatch away the shimmering plate of light that adorned her husband's cranium, but with no more effect than if she had tried to grasp a sunbeam, and without altering its position by a hair's-breadth. Girdling the top of his forehead where the hair began, the halo hung low over the back of his neck, with a slight tilt which gave it a coquettish look.

The foretaste of beatitude did not cause Duperrier to overlook the consideration he owed to his wife's peace of mind. He himself possessed too great a sense of discretion and modesty not to perceive that there were grounds for her disquiet. The gifts of God, especially when they wear a somewhat gratuitous aspect, are seldom accorded the respect they deserve, and the world is all too ready to find in them a subject of malicious gossip.

Duperrier did his utmost, so far as the thing was possible, to make himself at all times inconspicuous. Regretfully putting aside the bowler hat which he had hitherto regarded as an indispensable attribute of his accountant's calling, he took to wearing a large felt hat, light in colour, of which the wide brim exactly covered the halo provided he wore it rakishly on the back of his head. Thus clad, there was nothing startlingly out-of-the-way in his appearance to attract the attention of the passer-by. The brim of his hat merely had a slight phosphorescence which by daylight might pass for the sheen on the surface of smooth felt. During office hours he was equally successful in avoiding the notice of his employer and fellow-workers. His desk, in the small shoe factory in Ménilmontant where he kept the books, was situated in a glass-paned cubby-hole between two workshops, and his state of isolation saved him from awkward questions. He wore the hat all day, and no one was sufficiently interested to ask him why he did so.

But these precautions did not suffice to allay his wife's misgivings. It seemed to her that the halo must already be a subject of comment among the ladies of the district, and she went almost furtively about the streets adjoining the Rue Gabrielle, her buttocks contracted and her heart wrung with agonising suspicions, convinced that she heard the echo of mocking laughter as she passed. To this worthy woman who had never had any ambition other than to keep her place in a social sphere ruled by the cult of the absolute norm, the glaring eccentricity with which her husband had been afflicted rapidly assumed cata-

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strophic proportions. Its very improbability made it monstrous. Nothing would have induced her to accompany him out of doors. The evenings and Sunday afternoons which they had previously devoted to small outings and visits to friends were now passed in a solitary intimacy which became daily more oppressive. In the living-room of light oak where between meals the long leisure hours dragged by, Mme Duperrier, unable to knit a single stitch, would sit bitterly contemplating the halo, while Duperrier, generally reading some work of devotion and feeling the brush of angels' wings, wore an expression of beatific rapture which added to her fury.

From time to time, however, he would glance solicitously at her, and noting the expression of angry disapproval on her face would feel a regret which was incompatible with the gratitude he owed to Heaven, so that this in its turn inspired him with a feeling of remorse at one remove.

So painful a state of affairs could not long continue without imperilling the unhappy woman's mental equilibrium. She began presently to complain that the light of the halo, bathing the pillows, made it impossible for her to sleep at nights. Duperrier, who sometimes made use of the divine illumination to read a chapter of the Scriptures, was obliged to concede the justice of this grievance, and he began to be afflicted with a sense of guilt. Finally, certain events, highly deplorable in their consequences, transformed this state of unease into one of acute crisis.

Upon setting out for the office one morning, Duperrier passed a funeral in the Rue Gabrielle, within a few yards of their house. He had become accustomed, outrageous though it was to his natural sense of courtesy, to greet acquaintances by merely raising a hand to his hat; but being thus confronted by the near presence of the dead he decided, after thinking the matter over, that nothing could relieve him of the obligation to uncover himself entirely. Several shopkeepers, yawning in their doorways, blinked at the sight of the halo, and gathered together to discuss the phenomenon. When she came out to do her shopping Mme Duperrier was assailed with questions, and in a state of extreme agitation uttered denials whose very vehemence appeared suspect. Upon his return home at midday her husband found her in a state of nervous crisis which caused him to fear for her reason.

'Take off that halo!' she cried. 'Take it off instantly! I never want to see it again!'

Duperrier gently reminded her that it was not in his power to remove it, whereupon she cried still more loudly:

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'If you had any consideration for me you'd find some way of getting rid of it. You're simply selfish, that's what you are!'

These words, to which he prudently made no reply, gave Duperrier much food for thought. And on the following day a second incident occurred to point to the inevitable conclusion. Duperrier never missed early morning Mass, and since he had become endowed with the odour of sanctity he had taken to hearing it at the Basilica of the Sacré-Coeur. Here he was obliged to remove his hat, but the church is a large one and at that hour of the morning the congregation was sufficiently sparse to make it a simple matter for him to hide behind a pillar.

On this particular occasion, however, he must have been less circumspect than usual. As he was leaving the church after the service an elderly spinster flung herself at his feet crying, 'St. Joseph! St. Joseph!', and kissed the hem of his overcoat. Duperrier beat a hasty retreat, flattered but considerably put out at recognising his adorer, who lived only a few doors away. A few hours later the devoted creature burst into the apartment, where Mme Duperrier was alone, uttering cries of—'St. Joseph! I want to see St. Joseph!'

Although somewhat lacking in brilliant and picturesque qualities, St. Joseph is nevertheless an excellent saint: but his unsensational merits, with their flavour of solid craftsmanship and passive goodwill, seem to have brought upon him some degree of injustice. There are indeed persons, some of the utmost piety, who, without even being conscious of it, associate the notion of naïve complaisance with the part he played in the Nativity. This impression of simple-mindedness is further enhanced by the habit of super-imposing upon the figure of the saint the recollection of that other Joseph who resisted the advances of Potiphar's wife.

Mme Duperrier had no great respect for the presumed sanctity of her husband, but this fervour of adoration which with loud cries invoked him by the name of St. Joseph seemed to her to add the finishing touch to his shame and absurdity. Goaded into a state of almost demented fury, she chased the visitor out of the apartment with an umbrella and then smashed several piles of plates.

Her first act upon her husband's return was to have hysterics, and when finally she had regained her self-control she said:

'For the last time I ask you to get rid of that halo. You can do it if you choose. You know you can.' Duperrier hung his head, not daring to ask how she thought he should go about it, and she went on:

'It's perfectly simple. You have only to sin.'

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Uttering no word of protest, Duperrier withdrew to the bedroom to pray.

'Almighty God,' he said in substance, 'you have granted me the highest reward that man may hope for upon earth, excepting martyrdom. I thank you, Lord, but I am married and I share with my wife the bread of tribulation which you deign to send us, no less than the honey of your favour. Only thus can a devout couple hope to walk in your footsteps. And it so happens that my wife cannot endure the sight or even the thought of my halo, not at all because it is a gift bestowed by Heaven but simply because it's a halo. You know what women are. When some unaccustomed happening does not chance to kindle their enthusiasm it is likely to upset all the store of rules and harmonies which they keep lodged in their little heads. No one can prevent this, and though my wife should live to be a hundred there will never be any place for my halo in her scheme of things. Oh God, you who see into my heart, you know how little store I set by my personal tranquillity and the evening slippers by the fireside. For the rapture of wearing upon my head the token of your goodwill I would gladly suffer even the most violent domestic upheavals. But, alas, it is not my own peace of mind that is imperilled. My wife is losing all taste for life. Worse still, I can see the day approaching when her hatred of my halo will cause her to revile Him who bestowed it upon me. Am I to allow the life-companion you chose for me to die and damn her soul for all eternity without making an effort to save her? I find myself today at the parting of the ways, and the safe road does not appear to me to be the more merciful. That your spirit of infinite justice may talk to me with the voice of my conscience is the prayer which in this hour of my perplexity I lay at your radiant feet, oh Lord.'

Scarcely had Duperrier concluded this prayer than his conscience declared itself in favour of the way of sin, making of this an act of duty demanded by Christian charity. He returned to the living-room, where his wife awaited him, grinding her teeth.

'God is just,' he said, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. 'He knew what he was doing when he gave me my halo. The truth is that I deserve it more than any man alive. They don't make men like me in these days. When I reflect upon the vileness of the human herd and then consider the manifold perfections embodied in myself I am tempted to spit in the faces of the people in the street. God has rewarded me, it is true, but if the Church had any regard for justice I should be an archbishop at the very least.'

Duperrier had chosen the sin

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of pride, which enabled him, while exalting his own merits, in the same breath to praise God, who had singled him out. His wife was not slow to realise that he was sinning deliberately and at once entered into the spirit of the thing.

'My angel,' she said, 'you will never know how proud I am of you. My cousin Léopold, with his car and his villa at Vesinet, is not worthy to unloose the latchet of your shoe.'

'That is precisely my own opinion. If I had chosen to concern myself with sordid matters I could have amassed a fortune as easily as any man, and a much bigger one than Léopold's, but I chose to follow a different road and my triumph is of another kind. I despise his money as I despise the man himself and all the countless other half-wits who are incapable of perceiving the grandeur of my modest existence. They have eyes and see not.'

The utterance of sentiments such as these, spoken at first from half-closed lips, his heart rent with shame, became within a short time, a simple matter for Duperrier, a habit costing him no effort at all. And such is the power of words over the human mind that it was not long before he accepted them as valid currency. His wife, however, anxiously watching the halo, and seeing that its lustre showed no sign of diminishing, began to suspect that her husband's sin was lacking in weight and substance. Duperrier readily agreed with this.

'Nothing could be more true,' he said. 'I thought I was giving way to pride when in fact I was merely expressing the most simple and obvious of truths. When a man has attained to the uttermost degree of perfection, as I have done, the word "pride" ceases to have any meaning.'

This did not prevent him from continuing to extol his merits, but at the same time he recognised the necessity for embarking upon some other form of sin. It appeared to him that gluttony was, of the Deadly Sins, the one most suited to his purpose, which was to rid himself of the halo without too far forfeiting the goodwill of Heaven. He was supported in this conclusion by the recollection, from his childhood days, of gentle scoldings for excessive indulgence in jam or chocolate. Filled with hope, his wife set about the preparation of rich dishes whose variety enhanced their savour. The Duperriers' dinner-table was loaded with game, pâté, river-trout, lobster, sweets, pastries and vintage wines. Their meals lasted twice as long as hitherto, if not three times. Nothing could have been more hideous and revolting than the spectacle of Duperrier, his napkin tied round his neck, his face crimson and his eyes glazed with satiation, loading his plate

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with a third helping, washing down roast and stuffing with great gulps of claret, belching, dribbling sauce and gravy, and perspiring freely under his halo. Before long he had developed such a taste for good cooking and rich repasts that he frequently rebuked his wife for an over-cooked joint or an unsuccessful mayonnaise. One evening, annoyed by his incessant grumbling, she said sharply:

'Your halo seems to be flourishing. Anyone would think it was growing fat on my cooking, just as you are. It looks to me as though gluttony isn't a sin after all. The only thing against it is that it costs money, and I can see no reason why I shouldn't put you back on vegetable soup and spaghetti."

'That's enough of that!' roared Duperrier. 'Put me back on vegetable soup and spaghetti, will you? By God, I'd like to see you try! Do you think I don't know what I'm doing? Put me back on spaghetti, indeed! The insolence! Here am I, wallowing in sin just to oblige you, and that's the way you talk. Don't let me hear another word. It would serve you right if I slapped your face.'

One sin leads to another, in short, and thwarted greed, no less than pride, promotes anger. Duperrier allowed himself to fall into this new sin without really knowing whether he was doing it for his wife's sake or because he enjoyed it. This man who had hitherto been distinguished by the gentleness and equability of his nature now became given to thunderous rages; he smashed the crockery and on occasions went so far as to strike his wife. He even swore, invoking the name of his Creator. But his outbursts, growing steadily more frequent, did not save him from being both arrogant and gluttonous. He was, in fact, now sinning in three different ways, and Mme Duperrier mused darkly on God's infinite indulgence.

The fact is that the noblest of virtues can continue to flourish in a soul sullied by sin. Proud, gluttonous and choleric, Duperrier nevertheless remained steeped in Christian charity, nor had he lost anything of his lofty sense of duty as a man and a husband. Finding that Heaven remained unmoved by his anger, he resolved to be envious as well. To tell the truth, without his knowing it, envy had already crept into his soul. Rich feeding, which puts a burden on the liver, and pride, which stirs the sense of injustice, may dispose even the best of men to envy his neighbour. And anger lent a note of hatred to Duperrier's envy.

He became jealous of his relations, his friends, his employer, the shopkeepers of the neighbourhood and even the stars of sport and screen whose photographs appeared in the papers. Everything infuriated him, and he was known

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to tremble with ignoble rage at the thought that the people next door possessed a cutlery service with silver handles, whereas his own were only of bone.

But the halo continued to glow with undiminished brightness. Instead of being dismayed by this, he concluded that his sins were lacking in reality, and he had no difficulty in reasoning that his supposed glutttony did not in fact exceed the natural demands of a healthy appetite, while his anger and his envy merely bore witness to a lofty craving for justice. It was the halo itself, however, which furnished him with the most solid arguments.

'I'm bound to say I would have expected Heaven to be a little more fussy,' his wife said. 'If all your gluttony and boasting and brutality and malice have done nothing to dim your halo, it doesn't look as though I need worry about *my* place in Paradise.'

'Hold your jaw!' roared the furious man. 'How much longer have I got to listen to your nagging? I'm fed up with it. You think it funny, do you, that a saintly character like myself should have to plunge into sin for the sake of your blasted peace of mind? Stow it, d'you hear me?'

The tone of these replies was clearly lacking in that suavity which may rightly be looked for in a man enhaloed by the glory of God. Since he had entered upon the paths of sin Duperrier had become increasingly given to strong language. His formerly ascetic countenance was becoming bloated with rich food. Not only was his vocabulary growing coarse, but a similar vulgarity was invading his thoughts. His vision of Paradise, for example, had undergone a notable transformation. Instead of appearing to him as a symphony of souls in robes of cellophane, the dwelling-place of the elect came to look more and more like a vast dining-room. Mme Duperrier did not fail to observe the changes that were overtaking her husband and even to feel some anxiety for the future. Nevertheless, the thought of his possible descent into the abyss still did not outweigh in her mind the horror of singularity. Rather than an enhaloed Duperrier she would have preferred a husband who was an atheist, a debauchee and as crude of speech as her cousin Léopold. At least she would not then have to blush for him before the milkman.

No especial decision was called for on the part of Duperrier for him to lapse into the sin of sloth. The arrogant belief that he was required at the office to perform tasks unworthy of his merits, together with the drowsiness caused by heavy eating and drinking, made him naturally disposed to be idle; and since he had sufficient conceit to believe that he must excel in all things, even the worst, he very

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soon became a model of indolence. The day his indignant employer sacked him, he received the sentence with his hat in his hand.

'What's that on your head?' his employer asked.

'A halo,' said Duperrier.

'Is it indeed? And I suppose that's what you've been fooling around with when you were supposed to be working?'

When he told his wife of his dismissal, she asked him what he intended to do next.

'It seems to me that this would be a good moment to try the sin of avarice,' he answered gaily.

Of all the Deadly Sins, avarice was the one that called for the greatest effort of willpower on his part. To those not born avaricious it is the vice offering the fewest easy allurements, and when it is adopted on principle there is nothing to distinguish it, at least in the early stages, from that most sterling of all virtues, thrift.

Duperrier subjected himself to severe disciplines, such as confining himself to gluttony, and thus succeeded in gaining a solid reputation for avarice among his friends and acquaintances. He really liked money for its own sake, and was better able than most people to experience the malicious thrill which misers feel at the thought that they control a source of creative energy and prevent it from functioning. Counting up his savings, the fruit of a hitherto laborious existence, he came by degrees to know the hideous pleasure of harming others by damming a current of exchange and of life. This outcome, simply because it was painfully achieved, filled Mme Duperrier with hope. Her husband had yielded so easily to the seductions of the other sins that God, she thought, could not condemn him very severely for an innocent, animal surrender which made him appear rather a victim deserving of compassion. His deliberate and patient progress along the road of avarice, on the other hand, could only be the fruit of a perverse desire which was like a direct challenge to Heaven.

Nevertheless, although Duperrier became miserly to the point of putting trouser-buttons in the collection-bag, the brilliance and size of the halo remained unimpaired. This new setback, duly noted, plunged husband and wife into despair.

Proud, gluttonous, angry, envious, slothful and avaricious, Duperrier felt that his soul was still perfumed with innocence. Deadly though they were, the six sins he had thus far practised were nevertheless such as a first communicant may confess to without despairing. The deadliest of all, lust, filled him with horror. The others, it seemed to him, might be said to exist almost outside the sphere of God's notice. In the case of each, sin or peccadillo, it all depended

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on the size of the dose. But lust, the sin of the flesh, meant unqualified acceptance of the Devil's work. The enchantments of the night were a foretaste of the burning shades of Hell, the darting tongues were like the flames of eternity, the moans of ecstasy, the writhing bodies, these did but herald the wailing of the damned and the convulsions of flesh racked by endless torment.

Duperrier had not deliberately reserved the sin of the flesh to the last: he had simply refused to contemplate it. Mme Duperrier herself could not think of it without disquiet. For many years the pair had lived in a state of delicious chastity, their nightly rest attended, until the coming of the halo, by dreams as pure as the driven snow. As she thought of it, the recollection of those years of continence was a source of considerable annoyance to Mme Duperrier, for she did not doubt that the halo was the result. Plainly that lily-white nimbus could be undone by lust alone.

Duperrier, after obstinately resisting his wife's persuasions, at length allowed himself to be overdone. Once again his sense of duty cast out fear. Having reached the decision he was embarrassed by his ignorance; but his wife, who thought of everything, bought him a revolting book in which all the essentials were set forth in the form of plain and simple instruction. The night-time spectacle of that saintly man, the halo encircling his head, reading a chapter of the abominable work to his wife, was a poignant one indeed. Often his voice trembled at some infamous word or some image more hideously evocative than the rest.

Having thus achieved a theoretical mastery of the subject, he still delayed while he considered whether this last sin should be consummated in domestic intimacy or elsewhere. Mme Duperrier took the view that it should all be done at home, adducing reasons of economy which did not fail to weigh with him; but having considered all the pros and cons he concluded that he had no need to involve her in vile practices which might be prejudicial to her own salvation. As a loyal husband he valiantly resolved that he alone should run the risks.

Thereafter Duperrier spent most of his nights in disreputable hotels where he pursued his initiation in company with the professionals of the quarter. The halo, which he could not conceal from these wretched associates, led to his finding himself in various odd situations, sometimes embarrassing and sometimes advantageous.

In the beginning, owing to his anxiety to conform to the instructions in his manual, he sinned with little exaltation but rather with the methodical application of a dancer learning a new step or figure of cho-

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reography. However, the desire for perfection to which his pride impelled him soon achieved its lamentable reward in the notoriety which he gained among the women with whom he consorted. Although he came to take the liveliest pleasure in these pursuits, Duperrier nevertheless found them expensive and was cruelly afflicted in his avarice.

One evening on the Place Pigalle he made the acquaintance of a creature twenty years of age, already a lost soul, whose name was Marie-Jannick. It was for her, so it is believed, that the poet Maurice Fombeure wrote the charming lines:

C'est Marie-Jannick
De Landivisiau
Qui tue les moustiques
Avec son sabot.

Marie-Jannick had come from Brittany six months previously to go into service as maid-of-all-work in the home of a municipal councillor who was both a socialist and an atheist. Finding herself unable to endure the life of this godless household, she had given notice and was now courageously earning her living on the Boulevard de Clichy. As was to be expected, the halo made a deep impression on that little religious soul. To Marie-Jannick, Duperrier seemed the equal of St. Yves and St. Ronan, and he, on his side, was not slow to perceive the influence he had over her and to turn it to profit.

Thus it is that on this very day, the 22nd February of the year 1944, amid the darkness of winter and of war, Marie-Jannick, who will shortly be twenty-five, may be seen walking her beat on the Boulevard de Clichy. During the black-out hours the stroller between the Place Pigalle and the Rue des Martyrs may be startled to observe, floating and swaying in the darkness, a mysterious circle of light that looks rather like a ring of Saturn. It is Duperrier, his head adorned with the glorious halo which he no longer seeks to conceal from the curiosity of all and sundry; Duperrier, burdened with the weight of the seven Deadly Sins, who, lost to all shame, supervises the labours of Marie-Jannick, administering a smart kick in the pants when her zeal flags, and waiting at the hotel door to count her takings by the light of the halo.

But from the depths of his degradation, through the dark night of his conscience, a murmur yet rises from time to time to his lips, a prayer of thanksgiving for the absolute gratuity of the gifts of God.

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On paper, Joe Vargo was an unimportant member of the exploratory expedition to Chronos; Joe, however, was a realist, and in alien surroundings, that can be a quality worth more than gold, great wisdom, or atomic guns. . . .

THE HOMING INSTINCT OF JOE VARGO

by Stephen Barr

JUST OUT OF SIGHT OF MANHATtan Island in the approach to its waterways is a small artificial island, put there during World War III for some forgotten military purpose. It has been abandoned for many years and is never visited —indeed it is never seen except by passing planes and is no more a matter of notice than a stone beside the road. It is out of sight of ships except as a lump on the horizon, and large and small craft, fishing or otherwise, must steer clear of it because of the five-mile-wide under-water concrete shelf that surrounds it and makes the adjacent sea unnavigable.

To a man standing at the top of its rusted tower the glow of New York's lights can be seen in the distance when the sky is clear at night. A man stood there now: but his eyes were fixed on a star that shone ovehead, one of the stars that, as astronomers reckon, lie close to us. This star has no particular interest for most people, but this man knew it well as the small white sun around which revolves the planet Chronos.

Just before the termination of the Second Chronos Expedition it was decided that it would be the last expedition to Chronos. Or at least for now: unless at some future date a means was contrived to blow up a planet and save the pieces. With existing technics the former was entirely practicable but the pieces would not be. The half-life of their untouchableness would be about that of a man.

Chronos has inside of it minerals that the expedition wanted, but on the outside it supported a form of life so virulent and combative that man could not stay there. It has been tried, but as Joe Vargo said, "It'll allow one, or

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maybe two people aboard—then it gets its dander up."

Joe Vargo was the subject of another decision of the expedition, which was made by the crew, and it was to leave him behind when they went home. There was nothing wrong with Joe except that he was always right. Joe had been with the first expedition and had told the Director they wouldn't stay there a week. He hadn't said why; he just said they wouldn't. As it happened they left in less than that.

The life-form that made Chronos untenable was an organism that resembled the slime on wet rocks, except this slime was on dry rocks as well, and when it chose to do so it moved over onto other things, such as life-forms. It was never given a name, the expedition always referred to it as It.

The day the first expedition landed, It was not immediately noticed. Menken, the Director, said, "I think we'd better divide into task-forces. The long-distance boys say there's minerals here, so I want O'Neil to take whoever he needs and start checking on that. I don't want any time wasted in experiments with the possible toxic effects of our environment. Let's just assume that the atmosphere is poisonous, the water's poisonous, the plants are poisonous and everything is infested with deadly diseases. So keep your suits on and your helmets shut.

"Wilkes will take a look at the flora and fauna if any, and keep in constant touch, as there just might be something dangerous, although I personally doubt it—"

Joe Vargo interrupted him.

"Of course I'm only a lowly navigator and I don't know about these things, but Doctor, something tells me we ought to watch our step. Something large and uncanny is watching us, I bet you."

Menken frowned slightly. "Joe, for Pete's sake, button it, will you?" He scratched his ear and went on. "Well, as I say, keep in constant touch. I will head up a group consisting of everybody else, except cook, to batten down the hatches, make a shelter and check on the weather conditions. If I spend another night in that damned ship I'll . . . Well, anyway, get moving. Cook, I want to see you."

The personnel had separated and Joe Vargo, by going to his control cabin, contrived not to be on any of the three details. As soon as the coast was clear he wandered off by himself toward a rise in the ground that was covered with brownish shrubs. The air—it must be air, he thought—was very clear and the shadows intense and sharp. This was, he supposed, because the sun that shone on them was so tiny and so bright, impossible to look at straight. A white dwarf: distant, but burning fiercely and warming the land-

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scape. Chronos was bigger than Earth but not much heavier so that the pull of gravity felt natural, not like the giddiness on the satellites.

The minute sample of the planet's surface that he could see reminded him of North Africa, though the details were different. The plants—surely they were plants—were mostly the reddish color of a copper beech and the leaves of the bushes were not entirely separate, but joined by a continuous web as are the fingers of a frog. A few birds were in the air. At least to Joe Vargo they resembled birds. Far across the rolling sandy ground were stands of tall palm-like trees around which the birds hovered, and further off still there was a lake, and on the horizon a range of mountains, not blue in this hard light, but black. Perhaps nearer to the planet's equator it would resemble Central Africa, and nearer to the poles . . . who knew—perhaps polar bears? Too far to think about.

Joe, disregarding the director's admonition, opened his helmet valve and tested the atmosphere briefly. Air, just as he thought. Doctor Menken was probably only fooling. A comical fellow, their director. Joe took off his helmet and breathed deeply. There was an unfamiliar tang, almost spicy, and he toyed with the idea of taking off his protective suit as well, but thought better of it; there might be things much worse than poison ivy around. He put his helmet on again so as to hear any message that might come over the intercom. I wonder, he thought, if I'd have time to have a look at that lake? He decided to chance it; his absence wouldn't be noticed for a while, each group would assume he was with another. A small lizard-like animal with six legs ran across his boot. Over on still higher ground where some trees were he heard odd squawkings, and the birds, taking alarm at something, rose into the still air and were flapping around in excitement.

As he drew closer, Joe Vargo could make out that the trees grew in more or less of a circle. Something seemed to be moving in a jerky way against the sky-line at their feet. Then he could no longer see it. As he crested the rise, he found a small pond lying in the middle of the trees. Except for the shadows cast by the bird over his head nothing moved. The surface of the water was still, and it was dark and opaque. Around the edge were damp stones but nothing resembling moss or sedges. He stood regarding the noncommittal scene without going any nearer. What had frightened the birds? Something made his spine tingle, and he turned back toward camp and the ship.

Halfway back, his intercom buzzed and Menken's voice said, "Vargo? Where the hell are you?"

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Joe didn't answer.

"Vargo? I'm not trying to play nurse-maid, damn it! I asked you and everybody else to keep in touch. Come in."

Let him wonder, thought Joe. I just had my helmet off, so I couldn't hear him. That's why I'm not answering: I didn't hear him. Then he remembered the order about suits and helmets.

"O.K., Doc. I'm on my way."

"Where the hell are you? Or do you know?"

"Well, speaking as a lowly navigator, I'd say I was a mile and a half from the ship in the direction of what seems to be just about due west if this one turns the same way as Earth." There was a silence and then Menken's voice came more strongly, as though he had come closer to the mike or the power had been turned up.

"Snap into it Joe, will you? We may have to take off—" There were confused background noises and he could hear a voice saying, "Nothing. Nothing at all, I tell you . . ."

Joe Vargo looked back at the ring of trees, now deserted by the flying creatures, and down at his feet as another of the little six-legged lizards ran across them. There were several others in sight and they seemed not to notice him. His boots were damp, he saw, and he wondered how they could be: he had not gone near the pond, and the ground was dry. Could it be the lizards? No, they were as dry as the sandy ground they infested and left no trail. The shadows were dark, even those cast by stones, and he saw that his own shadow stretched far in front of him; the tiny fierce sun was setting, but losing nothing of its brilliance as it approached the far-off mountain range.

In a little while he saw the top of their ship over the rise of ground with the brown shrubs. It was in the direction that he knew it should be, but it was a little farther than he remembered. His legs felt much more tired than the rest of his body, but walking through sand was the reason; not being thirty-nine. . . . My body is as good as my mind, he thought. *Mens corpora* in reverse. The fatigue of his legs became quite out of proportion, and he looked at them. The boot parts of his suit were damp up to the knees. Sweat? He felt himself: his forehead, his wrists, his underwarms; no sweat. It was getting colder.

Inside the ship Menken was cursing. The ports were closed and he had his suit and helmet off. He was surrounded by a group of confused men.

"Get him onto a cot, damn it!"

"All right now, heave . . ."

"There we are."

"Which one of you guys is a medic?" Exchange of glances but no answer.

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"Then for Pete's sake, who was on Wilkes' detail? Somebody here must be an M.D."

"I thought you were, sir."

Menken clenched his hands in the air.

"Thirty years ago! Get to it, damn it."

Doctor Wilkes lay on his back, breathing harshly, his face as pale as paper. His eyelids were open at the bottom but the eyes were rolled up and the irises invisible. There were bruises on his elbows and knees where he had fallen, and his boots were wet.

"Pulse O.K. Bit fast."

"Respiration very fast; regular."

"Got the bug-check yet?"

"In a minute. Blood's O.K."

"Electro looks funny— Hold everything."

"We're holding it."

"Bug-check O.K., except a trace of the stuff from—"

"Electro's way off! Get him ready for a shot, quick!"

"K injection?"

Doctor Wilkes's eyes rolled down and opened. He sat up.

"What the hell are you doing?" he said in a weak voice. "I fainted."

"Take it easy. Lie back."

"I'm all right now, I tell you. I—" The hypodermic was not felt, he lay back and closed his eyes. Menken looked at the group around the sick doctor and then at his watch.

"What was he saying when you brought him in?" he asked. "You were all making such a row I couldn't make it out."

One of the men bending over the dials of the electro said without turning, "He said he got his foot stuck in a rock. Then he collapsed. I caught him."

"He said he what?"

The man at the dials wrote a number on a pad before answering. Then he said, "Something like white and trembling." Another man turned to Menken.

"He said to take his boots off. He said his foot—"

"All right, we'll go into that later when he comes to. How is he?"

"We can't tell, sir. He's very weak."

Menken looked at his watch again. He reached over and picked up his helmet and spoke into the intercom, "Vargo? Where the hell are you?" There was no answer. Just like Vargo. Joe Vargo the smart guy, the never-around man. Off somewhere else.

"Vargo? I'm not trying to play nurse-maid, damn it!" He ought to know that; he puts me in a spot with the other guys—just because I was his instructor in college he gets away with it. He could be in serious trouble and he'd be too proud to admit it. "I asked you and everybody else to keep in touch. Come in." Silence. No, he isn't in trouble: he never really is. Probably took off his helmet and can't hear me. . . .

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One of the medics said, "He's coming out of it now, Doctor Menken. I think maybe he's going to be O.K." Menken put down his helmet and went over to look at Wilkes, who was breathing more quietly, but was as white as before. He seemed to be asleep instead of in a private battle. Menken's helmet squeeked with a nearly inaudible message. The little voice sounded like a kitten in a drainpipe, but it was unmistakable.

"O.K., Doc. I'm on my way."

An hour and a half later William H. Wilkes, M.D., came to, sat up on his cot and smiled at them and said, "Funny thing. I thought it was only on the rocks, but when I put my hand—" and fell back. He died without coming to again, shortly before the dawn of Chronos' furious miniscule sun. Menken and his crew were not thinking of Joe Vargo, when his voice was heard on the intercom which had been hooked up to the loudspeaker. 'Well, I finally got here. So let me in, but watch out for the outer airlock panel; it's caught on something."

They had to go through decontamination all over again when he came in, but Joe was the conquering hero, a Ulysses returned, and was full of himself.

"Wilkes is dead." Menken told him.

"Willy the Wilk? No! I don't believe it!" said Joe Vargo, "What'd he do? What happened?"

"We don't know. Perhaps since you've been out and around for so long you might have some idea. Maybe you've seen something?"

Joe Vargo never once looked toward the cot where Wilkes' body was lying. Instead he looked down at his own feet.

"Somebody," he said, "or something—I wouldn't know which—tied my shoelaces together. So I kept falling down. I got here though." He looked around for approval. Menken drew him aside.

"I can't blame you for what's happened to Wilkes, Joe, but why is it always at a time like this you pull something? It looks lousy to the rest of the men, and you and I being old friends makes it that much worse. What's all this crap about your shoelaces?? Before Joe could answer, one of the M.D.s said, "I think we ought to do an autopsy, Doctor Menken. The symptoms are . . . Well, we don't quite know . . ."

"All right, go to it." Menken turned to Joe Vargo again. "What held you up so long after you were in contact?"

"Well, as I say, I kept falling over. Something was holding my feet back, like when you try to walk fast in water. I couldn't see anything, except my boots are wet right up to the knee, and it's as dry as a desert around here. Finally when the sun went down there was a hell of a big moon coming up opposite, and I saw I was leav-

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ing a trail as if a thread was attached to my foot and was dragging through the sand. I got a funny feeling. I bent down and felt it. Then I tried to snap it off. This thread's so damned thin you couldn't see it but it wouldn't break; it just cut into my hand. Then I tried kicking loose, and both boots up to the knee seemed to tighten up. I got scared there for a minute. So I spat on my hands; they were pretty sweaty anyway, and I'd taken the gloves off, and gave another yank, and the damned thing just came apart. The loose end snaked back across the landscape and its trail disappeared over the hill! Boy! Then my boots gave a hell of a squeeze and I passed out. When I came to I couldn't move my legs and I thought the circulation was stopped for keeps, but my boots were loose again and after I rubbed my legs they were O.K. Jesus, some pins-and-needles. These boots are getting a trifle snug again, but I guess it's just the leather's shrunk. Do I rate a drink, John?"

"There's a bottle in my cabin in the locker. I don't know what to think about this rigmarole: it may be connected with what happened to Wilkes, or it may not, but I wish to God you'd stay put."

Vargo shrugged and replied, "Well, if I had you wouldn't have noticed the airlock was open."

Menken said, "That reminds me. Say, did anybody see what the airlock was caught on?" No one answered. "Well, how is it now?" Two crew members left and came back shortly looking puzzled.

"The pressure valve showed a small leak, sir. We can't seem to get it tight."

"For Pete's sake," said Menken. He went to the airlock and pressed the controls. His eye was on the edge of the panel at the bottom. He pressed again and the panel opened and closed, but not quite all the way. "Bring me a flash," he said and turned off the airlock lights. With the flash he shone a beam horizontally at floor level. Stretching in a nearly straight line to the entrance of the ward-room was an almost invisible thread that showed like a spider's web against the dark background.

Menken called out loudly, "Everybody get away from Wilkes' body! Stand back as far as you can!" He opened a wall locker and took out a small, exceedingly sharp hand-hatchet. "Vargo! Come here on the double! Somebody get me a block of hard-wood . . . Cook, get your cutting board."

When the board came he lifted the thread and slid the board under it. The thread had a feeling of somehow live tension, as though a man was holding the end of it. He swung the hatchet with all his force and the maple board split into two pieces, but the thread still lay intact across the floor-plates.

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"Holy cow!"

Joe Vargo said, "Let me get a blow-torch, Doc."

"All right." In a few minutes the steel plates under the thread were glowing bright orange, but the thread remained: glowing too, when the flame was on it.

"Try whacking it again while it's hot," said Joe.

"All right." Menken swung again, but with no result except to mar the floor plates and blunt the hatchet. He straightened up looking confused and worried. "Spit?" he said, "I wonder . . ." He leant over again and spat carefully onto the gleaming thread. It instantly disintegrated, the ends snapping back in opposite directions. The body on the ward-room table twitched and contorted oddly, and then relaxed. The airlock clicked into place.

"My God! Look at that!" Menken said, "I guess you can go on with the autopsy now; and try and get a sample of that stuff for analysis."

One of the younger medics said, "We were just going to tell you, sir: he died from internal hemorrhages, dozens of them! He's cut to pieces inside." There was a long silence. The director walked over to the body and looked down at it. It was as though Wilkes had been invaded by driver ants. . . .

After several hour's work with microscope and reagents, O'Neil and his chemists and assistant biologists made their hesitant and much qualified report. "We can't say for sure, but it seems to be a life-form all right, except it's apparently a silicon colloid . . . no carbon. Also there's no cellular structure: it's more like a liquid crystal. The molecular set-up must be something on the order of a polymer to explain that tensile strength. As to spit . . . well, we can only guess. It's breaking up fast spontaneously now, but organic acids seem to speed up the process even more, and saliva is mildly acid. So was the sweat on Vargo's hands."

Menken looked exasperated. "We can't go around spitting on the damned stuff—we'd run out of spit! Organic acids, eh? Cook, how about orange juice, lemon juice, or maybe vinegar?" The cook shook his head.

"All out, except a third of a bottle of wine vinegar."

"Well, can't you chemists come up with something?"

The ship lurched very slightly. A man standing next to one of the viewing ports gasped.

"My God, sir! Look!"

In the brilliant light outside they could see extending up to the ship from the distance a broad flat shining band, a yard wide or more, lying on the sandy ground. Where it met the base of the ship it had bunched together into a glistening mass that wrapped about one of their fins, and as they

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watched the fin began gradually to buckle.

"Stations, everybody!" Menken shouted. "Vargo, get set to blast off!" The ship rocked again very slightly and a creaking sound came from under the flooring.

"All right, give it all you've got, Joe! Let her have it!"

The jets roared and then screamed, and the ship rose into the air grudgingly and then paused with a heaving motion like a fishing float.

"Put it on over-drive!"

"We can't, we're right on the planet! The gravity'll . . ."

"The hell with that: "We're losing a fin. That damned thing will cut right through the ship. Hold on everyone, we've got to chance it."

There was a sudden silence and a spine-shattering jolt, and the ship broke loose and roared into space.

Menken reported back to Earth in person. He felt he could best explain what had happened face to face. The rest of the crew stayed on an unpopular, higher gravity planet called Sinon, and played rummy with stone arms and cards of lead. All except Joe Vargo. Somehow he managed to go back with Menken—he had sick headaches, he needed a rest, his leg still hurt him, he had to see his girl, he had to see a man about a dog. This was greatly resented by the crew, and Menken was annoyed, mostly at himself.

"I don't know why I let you do this to me, Joe," he told him, "but I'll tell you this—we're undoubtedly going to be sent back with a lot of fancy special equipment and I'll *have* to go; the rest will be volunteers . . . except, I'm not granting you this leave unless *you* agree now to come on the return trip. You're a thorn in my side, but you're the only over-drive navigator I trust."

The special equipment included among other things spray-guns and an assortment of organic compounds ranging from glacial acetic to some newly synthesised enzymes that could digest a billiard ball in two minutes. Also some exceptionally strong metallic suits of armor, in which Joe Vargo put little faith.

"It'll squeeze 'em flat like a paper carton. You mark my words, John."

The Second Expedition took the extra precaution of making a landing near one of the poles at about 80 degrees latitude. The axis of Chronos had no tilt, so it was neither winter nor summer, but the ground was covered with snow through which poked occasional reddish fuzzy plants, and the air was bitter cold. It was hoped that since It was evidently unaffected by heat, it might be found only in the warmer climates. Within two days that theory was disproved.

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The entire personnel had volunteered for the second expedition. Wilkes' place as biology head being taken by a small intense man from the Warsaw Institute of Science called Steinmann, and it had been his idea to land in a cold region of Chronos. "Life of any conceivable kind must have some relationship to heat," he said, "so there is at least a minimal chance we should not find it in a frigid area." The others agreed, except Joe Vargo.

"Baloney," he said; and as it turned out he was right. The others were more irked at this than they were made apprehensive by the discovery of It in their vicinity. By noon of the second thirty-one hour day, O'Neil's crew had located the desired ore; apparently at a not impractical depth, and preparations were being made for mining it. The extraction would be done on the spot with a small atomic pile and they hoped to be able to leave with their pay-load in a few weeks.

Joe Vargo and a mechanic were making minor repairs to the jet mechanism when word came that It had been seen. Two of O'Neil's crew had gone with a geiger counter over a barren wind-cleared highland and found themselves in sight of the sea. It was flecked with patches of ice, on the largest of which they could make out the indistinct forms of animals that seemed to be fishing smaller ones out of the water; not, it would appear, with humane intentions. Suddenly one of the men grabbed the other's arm.

"My God!" he whispered. "Look at that—over there!" He pointed at what appeared to be a patch of still water, oval-shaped and shining in the sunlight on the beach. It was about a hundred feet across. One of the icefloes with a few of the fishing animals on it had drifted near to the shore, and as the men watched, a glistening arm, transparent and aquamarine-colored, shot out from the oval patch and came down on the nearest animal. The others instantly slid into the sea and swam away. The one that was caught, enveloped as if by aspic, struggled frantically. In a few minutes it ceased to move, became misshapen and gradually smaller. Then it was no longer visible, and the arm was drawn back.

One of the men pressed his intercom button and began to make a report back to base; the other watched him, not wanting to look at the horror on the beach below. Neither of them saw a thin filament extending itself rapidly up the escarpment towards them, leaving a wake of miniature snow-flurries. The man making the report, his eyes on his companion's, saw him suddenly start and look at his feet.

The rest of the report was garbled and hysterical, and pieced to-

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gether afterwards with difficulty. The geiger counter was found later, twisted out of shape. The two men were not found, but the metal parts of their suits and gear were strewn all the way down to the beach. There was no sign of the oval patch.

That evening Menken held a council.

"I've half a mind to pull up stakes now," he said, "before anyone else gets hurt or It gets to the ship."

O'Neil said, "We haven't tried the sprays yet. I'd hate to leave all that ore just when we've found it. Why don't we at least try them before we quit?"

Steinmann jumped up and said, "Also it has perhaps a nucleus; we could try for the nucleus. I think that—"

Joe Vargo interrupted him. "No cells: no nucleus. It's all one continuous piece of jello, and if it thinks, it thinks like a bee-hive. *If* it thinks."

Menken put a watch of twelve men around the ship that night, with himself in command. They were armed with spray guns and dressed in the new armor. The mining base was left unguarded, for, as Steinmann suggested, since the organism seemed to go only for living things, and only animals at that, it would probably ignore a pile of untenanted machinery. The interminable night—fifteen and a half hours—finally came to an end. The dawn was brilliant, colorless and abrupt, more like the reappearance of the sun after a total eclipse. There had been no signs of It, and there were no marks in the snow.

Menken, issuing the order of the day, said, "There will be a special guard of eight wearing the armor, but I want every man to carry a spray gun. Doctor Steinmann has prepared a mixture of several of the organic sprays that he feels is our best bet. . . ."

When the mining party with guard got to their destination they saw that during the night they had been outgeneralled. The installation was entirely surrounded by an aquamarine moat. Evidently, It could think.

They came to a confused halt.

"Everyone start collecting spit," said Joe Vargo. No one laughed. At Menken's order they backed out of sight of the menace.

"Doctor Steinmann," Menken said, "I would like you to give me your private and honest opinion of the sprays. Now that you've finally seen the beast, and from what we've told you, how much reliance do you think we may put in the mixture?" Steinmann started to rise so he could see the mine-head again. Menken said, "I don't think I would do that, Doctor, if I were you." Steinmann sat back.

"You are probably right, Doctor," he said. "But it would not be my visibility but my heat that it

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would be aware of. Without a lens it can have no sense of a light-image; on the other hand with radiant heat, like the pit-viper, it can tell where I am. With such a body it cannot have a lens for the eye, but heat it can perhaps feel and determine direction."

"Without meaning to be rude," said Joe Vargo, "why couldn't it just as well be vibrations? When I got close to it that first time I had on my protective suit, and those suits are a hundred-percent insulated."

The little biologist smiled and said, "Very right, my dear young man. The two often go together: the sense of heat and the awareness of motion. Our exploration of many planets has shown us that, particularly the ones that have no light and are heated from the interior. The question of light perception is something else."

Joe Vargo sneered slightly. "I have been given to understand that radiant heat was a form of light," he said.

"A difference of degree is the important factor," replied Steinmann.

Menken said, "I think the best thing is for me to go over there with a spray gun and see what I can do, but I'd like to have one or two of you come up behind and give me cover. Also I'd like to hear Steinmann's opinion of this maneuver."

"My curiosity will not allow me to stay behind, Doctor," said Steinmann. "Furthermore I would like to see for myself if there is, as our friend says, truly no nucleus. I have always felt that no matter how cruel and unfamiliar a living thing may seem, it has a nucleus that can be reached." He smiled at Joe Vargo in an entirely friendly way.

Menken spearheaded the small group; the rest watched with their eyes just above the view-point. The organism remained where it was, placid but ominous. Menken was in front, his spray gun held in shaking hands. When they got to within a few yards, the moat thinned out and on both sides of them aquamarine-colored lines suddenly and frighteningly extended themselves backward toward their rear. At the sight of this, the rearguard crew streamed out from their position, spray guns ready, to prevent the encirclement that threatened Menken and his group.

"Keep it close, damn it!" Menken shouted. "String out behind in a tight double line facing out. Don't let yourselves get cut off!"

"Doctor," said Steinmann, "I think a little spray?"

Menken went almost to the edge of the nearest line and pushed the plunger of his spray gun. In front of him, stretching sideways from left to right over the snow was It's forefront. It was alive and It moved back from his foot, but

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It also moved forward with a questing pseudopod that waved searching and uncertain in the air at about the level of his waist. The part that was reached by the spray steamed slightly and disappeared. Nearby parts took its place and crept forward. He squirted at it again: part of it dissolved and the rest pulled back. He pushed almost madly at the plunger, and a larger and larger circle of withdrawal appeared, but he could see that beyond the reach of the acid It was forming itself into a ridge. Then this became a heavy, wide band which came up like a wave and enveloped a man over to his right. Menken could see that the unfortunate man's spray gun was somehow separated from him, and was held in a vacuole in which it was quickly transferred to the surface of the organism, whereupon it was ejected. Menken was too intent on saving himself to watch the dreadful transformation the man underwent.

"Back, everybody! Get back!" Then, as he turned to run, he saw the moat no longer lay in a continuous circle about the mine head, and Joe Vargo, taking advantage of this, had reached and climbed up to a part of the housing that contained the atomic pile. The double line of men, Menken at their rear, were making their way back as rapidly as they could, pumping a constant stream from their sprays on either side to keep from being hemmed in. But the two flanks of the organism that formed a long U were outdistancing them. The ones in the lead began to run, some abandoning their sprays; Vargo thought they might make it. . . .

So far, It had not seemed to be aware of Joe Vargo's proximity. He began frantically to remove the lead shielding from one side of the pile. Then he started the device. It was on a heavy, wheeled dolly, that enabled him to turn it like a searchlight, and where the radioactive beam fell, It split into blobs like spilled mercury. These were from a foot to a yard across and moved much more rapidly than the main mass. He swung the pile slowly in a circle, and the ground about the mine became dotted with the blobs. Finally he concentrated his aim in the direction opposite to that taken by Menken and the rest of the crew. He could see now that most if not all of the men were entirely surrounded by the parent body of the organism which had remained unaffected by the radioactivity. He turned off the pile and took a deep breath, and ran through the lane left by the retreating blobs. Unlike mercury, these did not join together again. One of them bounced into his path and he leaped over it and ran on, but in a moment became aware of something that impeded the motion of his legs. He

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stopped for an instant and squirted acid and enzymes; the feeling of tightness was gone, and he ran on again.

After a while he stopped, out of breath. The blobs were no longer in sight, and in a wide semicircle he cautiously made his way back to the ship. There were no signs of life and none of the crew had returned. He climbed the ladder to the air lock which, in spite of the cold, had been left open—the atmosphere now being known to be breathable—and shut it. Turning up the heat, he went to a locker and took out a bottle and drank from it. Then he went to a viewing port and looked in the direction of the mine.

Coming toward him across the snow he saw a small desperately running figure that stumbled from time to time and almost fell. As it approached the ship he saw it was Steinmann, and he hurried to the air lock and opened it.

"Help! For the love of God, bring your spray!"

Joe Vargo now saw that a thin line ran back in the snow from Steinmann's legs. He picked up his spray gun and shook it: almost empty. . . .

"Sorry," he said, "can't take a chance."

He pressed the air lock controls again.

Back in the navigator's chair he pulled a lever and the jets roared. Being almost directly under the ship, Steinmann instantly became a glowing mass of charcoal. . . .

An hour later, with Chronos at a safe distance, Joe Vargo tightened the safety straps and put the ship on over-drive. When his body was adjusted to its effects, he unfastened himself and went to the galley to make some coffee. When he got to the door his blood turned to ice: lying in the corner of the galley floor was a twenty-inch aquamarine puddle.

The combination of over-drive and inertia-moderator gives a gravitational pull towards the deck plates of about a quarter G, so that the thing was lying—not, thank God, floating about in free-fall. How on earth had it got there? It must have a diabolical intelligence of its own. He slammed the door and ran for his almost exhausted spray gun. He remembered what Steinmann had said about heat, and hurriedly put on an insulated suit and snapped the helmet shut. It was no protection, but with his own radiant heat blanketed, and if he went on tip-toe. . . ?

He went back to the galley and eased the door open. The thing had not moved. Standing on a shelf immediately beyond it was a large bottle of vinegar. Transferring the spray gun to his left hand, Joe Vargo reached over and picked up a spoon from a box next to him, and threw it onto the floor on the other side of the galley. A pseudopod formed and explored the

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spoon, but drew back again. It was not to be fooled that way . . .

Then he saw, just barely visible, several hair-like processes rise into the air and start waving about. One of them touched his arm and the rest at once settled on him, fastening about arms and legs. He turned the spray on them and they disappeared, but the gun ran dry almost before he could free himself. Perhaps he could shut It in: the door seemed to fit tightly, but he realized that with the thing in possession of the galley he would starve to death in the months it would take to get back to Earth, and Joe Vargo was determined to get back to Earth.

It put out no more hair-like filaments: It seemed to be considering. If he could only get at the vinegar. How could he lure it away without endangering himself? He looked around despairingly and his eye caught sight of the electric toaster. An idea came to him. The toaster was switched off but he saw that the long extension cord was connected to the wall-socket. Very carefully he reached for it and turned it on. Then he put it gently on the floor and tip-toed to one side. The wires began to glow and with a triumphant lurch the organism enveloped it. There was a dim flash as the toaster was crushed and short-circuited, and the galley lights went out, but in the light that came through the door Joe Vargo saw the thing pull back again: It didn't seem to like the toaster, or maybe it was the shock. Anyway, he had the vinegar now.

He unscrewed the cap and poured the contents slowly onto the floor, and as the acid reached it, the edges of the blob hissed and it withdrew into itself. It backed into a corner before the advancing liquid and tried to flow up the side of the metal walls, but it found no purchase. Pseudopods waved about, but Joe Vargo splashed vinegar on them and they vanished. Then the bottle was empty, but the thing by this time was no bigger than a saucer, and as the vinegar spread over the floor, hissed and disappeared.

Five months later Joe Vargo could read by the light of the approaching Sun, and he turned off the over-drive. In another week he coasted into the Earth's atmosphere and began to make preparations for a landing.

Home, at last!

After making some observations on ground-points, he realized that with luck he could make his landing on the field nearest to his home-town: New York. But at this point Joe Vargo's luck ran out. The jets, the forward ones that acted as breaks, would not go on, and he remembered too late the interrupted repairs that he and the mechanic had been making.

The ship was aimed right, how-

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ever, and he would have to take a chance with a parachute. But he must somehow slow up, otherwise he would be knocked to pieces by the air, and the outer skin of the ship was already glowing red from the terrific friction.

He dashed to the inertia-moderator and began rapidly to unfasten it from its base. If he could turn it on its side he might be able to turn the ship with it.

As the lights of New York began to show on the horizon, he switched on the current and the ship slowly turned in her course, end over end. Then he started the drive-jets and was flattened on the floor as the ship decelerated. When the ship had reduced its speed to a bearable point, he stopped the jets and looked out of a view-port, and saw that he was going to overshoot his mark. Quickly he put on a parachute suit, and went to the air lock. The ship would fall into the Atlantic, as they were travelling eastward, but he thought he might be able to land inland. He pressed the controls and the panel opened, but he was pinned like a piece of paper against the side by the stream of air. He exerted all his strength and managed at last to struggle over the edge, and was whipped away in an instant. The parachute opened with a bang and the elastic supporting lines stretched out: he felt as though he had broken in two. Then as he stopped swinging and began to float gently down, he saw the waters of the Lower Bay beneath him, and saw too that he was travelling rapidly out to sea. Joe Vargo could not swim, but as he drifted lower he saw that he was very likely going to make it after all. Directly in his path lay a small island, from the center of which stuck up a rusty iron tower.

A few minutes later he landed on the edge of that island. When he had stripped off the parachute, he searched, with increasing anxiety, by the light of his flash, until, tripping over a piece of wood, he dropped it and broke the bulb. He had no matches, but he had had time enough to find out that the island had long since been abandoned, and that there was no water except for the sea lapping against the concrete bulkheads.

When dawn came, he climbed the tower and looked about. Nothing was in sight but water.

A plane passed high over his head and he waved, but realized that he was completely invisible to them. He thought of waving his shirt, but remembered that it, like all his clothes, was dark grey.

He watched all day as he grew thirstier and less and less hopeful, but no vessel came in sight; only an occasional far-off plane. When night fell he saw the distant glow of the city. He looked up and made out the white pin-point of light that was Chronos's sun . . .

Joe Vargo was home.

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Though Jane Rice was raised in Kentucky, the southern hill family hilariously portrayed on the following pages is not modeled after real people—living, dead, or fictional. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is, of course, actual, and this is the truth about how it may be trapped.

THE RAINBOW GOLD

by Jane Rice

I'LL BET YOU GRANDMA KNOWS more interesting things than anybody. She don't say much—unless she's got something important to say, and maybe not then if it don't suit her to. But what she does say is generally surprising.

If it was somebody besides grandMa who told me there was a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow I'd think pshaw. GrandMa don't spoof a lot though. And I could tell she wasn't joshing me about the pot of rainbow gold because I could see it grow in her eyes from a tiny speck to a black, two-handle, three-leg pot with a mound of gold in it. Me and her are the only folks in the family whose eyes can do that. And we can just do it to each other.

After that, seemed to me like forever before we had us a storm with a rainbow attached to it. Then, one day nigh on to noon dinner when I was playing chariot with the stone boat hitched to the jenny mule, a pour come quick from over the other side of the mountain. Quick as it come, it was past us and gone. The sun snuck out from behind a pearly cloud and, while the last drops was still splashing plink-plop, lo and behold a rainbow commenced shapening with its end bending into Possum Hollow.

I drew a bead on it, lining it up between two tall fatwood trees, and let out for the Hollow. I went like a swarm. I don't believe I touched ground except on the high spots.

If I live to be as old as the mountain I won't forget when I skimmed over a rise and caught sight of the Hollow—full of light, like a magic thing. My! It was a glory to see.

I never known what a purely magniferous thing a rainbow was, near up, until I seen that one arching through the dripping branches into the glade. There was

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colors in it that there's *not* any such colors. And all the little diamond raindrops falling brilliant so that the whole Hollow glittered and glistened and winked and twinkled with a million, skillion rainbow dazzles—and the chunk of solid gold in the black two-handle, three-leg pot at the rainbow's end was the gleamingest, glowingest, goldest gold you could imagine. And then some. It was so gold it made you squinch.

I reckon it was lucky I was traveling too swift to pull up, or I'd probably have halted struck in my tracks. As it was, I went scudding down into the Hollow like a runaway wagon and would've shot on through and up the far side if I hadn't stretched and caught hold of a sycamore limb. I spun clean around it twice before I got slowed sufficient to let loose and, then, for a spell, I just leaned, bug-eyed and whopper-jawed, against the tree trunk, getting my wind back. And gawking at how everything was.

When I collected myself, I tiptoed to the pot of gold—though I don't know why I tiptoed, unless I figured I was dreaming and didn't want to wake myself up. I heaved and I hove, but I couldn't budge it. It weighed that heavy.

GrandMa hadn't mentioned what took place when the rainbow begun fading, but it stood to reason the gold disappeared if it wasn't separated from the source someway. Otherwise, there'd be pots of it from away back to Creation scattered thick as butternuts on the mountain, and if that was the case why hadn't us Pirtles ever found us a pot of it?

So, I sat on it.

It didn't enter my head *I* might vanish, or I wouldn't have been so spry to do it. As it turned out, I didn't vanish—but, later, when Easter asked me, "Why don't rainbows disappear people?" I got to studying on what could've happened to me and I fell kerplunk off the ceiling, where I was walking upside down to show Sukey how flies did it, and knocked out two teeth—one of mine, and one of Boo Baby's.

Anyway, like I said, I spread out and settled down on top of the gold to protect it and if there's anything more heart beating than sitting on a pot of gold, swinging your heels and gazing up into a rainbow, I don't know what it is. My! You wouldn't ever get looked out.

In awhile, that rainbow started fading until, without being able to say exactly when, it wasn't there anymore and the Hollow was back to usual and I'd have thought the whole shebang was a fancy if it hadn't been for the pot of gold. But, when I eased up and peeked, there it was—yellow as butter and bright as fireworks in the big black pot. And I took off like a frog on a hot skillet and headed for home.

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I was going at such a clip when I whished through the yard that nothing had a chance to get out of the way. I managed to steer clear of the jenny mule hitched to the stone boat but I fetched up in the kitchen, where everybody was fixing to eat, with chickens plastered all over me and Peonia's pet squirrel hanging on for dear life.

Ma said, "That's not how you was taught to come to the table. Switch yourself around and sashay in mannerly, the same as you was learned."

Peonia said, "That's not how to treat my squirrel neither. You give it here."

I said, "Ifoundusapotofgoldattheendoftherainbow!

Pa said, shooing a chicken off him, "Pay attention to your Ma. Nimble out, and mosey in proper. And simmer down. You sound like a Spring freshet."

I said, "But PA I foundusapotofgoldinPossumHollow!"

Pa said, "And take your foot out of the lard bucket."

GrandPa cupped his best ear with his hand and said, "Heh?"

Sukey said, "PA SAID FOR HIM TO TAKE HIS FOOT OUT OF THE LARD BUCKET."

GrandPa said, "That's funny. It feels like Tuesday to me. And you don't need to louden. I can hear."

Luke said, "It feels like Tuesday to me, too." And Duke said, "It is Tuesday. This time last month it was Saturday, so that makes today Tuesday. Next month this time it'll be Friday."

Peonia said, "Ma, make Little Joe give me my squirrel. Lookit how he's wearing it, like a scrap."

Easter said, admiring me, "How'd you get so many different shades? Did you do it on purpose? Can anybody do it? Would you show me how?" And, to everybody else, "Don't he look scrumptious?"

Ma said, jouncing Boo Baby who'd swallowed something, "In a way. In another way, he looks a mite peculiar." She cocked her head at me. "Son, do you feel normal?"

GrandPa said, "Pass the vittles. As far as it concerns me, that there potfull of gold Little Joe found can wait in Possum Hollow until I've ate."

Pa said, "A pot of what in Possum Hollow?"

"Gold, grandPa says," Luke and Duke answered him. They handed grandPa the hominy.

"How come you to know, grandPa?" Easter said.

GrandPa said, "Heh?"

Peonia said, prying her squirrel loose from me and cuddling it, "EASTER SAID HOW'D YOU KNOW?"

GrandPa said, "The boy said so, that's how. Twice," he added, helping himself to hominy. "As anybody who wasn't deaf could plainly hear."

Pa said, "A pot of *gold?*"

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"Yessir," I said, circling my arms to demonstrate how enormous it was. "It's—" but that was the furtherest I got because he was up, and away, and gone, yelling COME ON. And the rest of us, like always, picked up and took off and followed fast. Luke and Duke, running free, passed him once but they was so excited they got careless and lost the front spot when they tried to go by opposite sides of a persimmon tree. GrandPa got the notion it was the battle of Missionary Ridge and gradually took the lead—running free and easy like a boy and giving the rebel yell, and grandMa brought up the rear on the stone boat hitched to the jenny mule.

The lard bucket hampered my gait somewhat but the idea that maybe I had fancied the whole business hastened me a notch, so I averaged out fairly equal. I was mighty relieved when I seen the gold in the pot, same as I'd said it was.

My! We certainly had us a merriment there in the glade. I'll bet you there's echoes echoing yet, here, there, and yonder, through the mountain. Even grandMa hopped off the stone boat to cut a caper with grandPa who now had the notion the Civil War was over and that, this time, the South had won it.

Shortly, we quietened down and begun pondering on how to get our fortune home. Pa, strong as he is, couldn't but barely heft it with Luke and Duke helping him, and from the Hollow to the house was a long piece and hill the whole distance.

Easter said to me, "Could you witch it?"

I shook my head. The only things I can witch, besides water, is owls and crossing-places. I don't know why I can't witch nothing but water, owls, and crossing-places. I just can't, that's all—anymore than Easter can talk without making a question, or Sukey can make herself seen to anybody looking straight at her.

GrandMa said, more like she was thinking out loud than speaking to us, "You get two wishes on a pot of rainbow gold. You could use up a wish."

Easter said, "Don't wishes come in threes?"

GrandMa said, "That's an old wives' tale, sugar. Wishes come in twos and fours. Rainbow gold is a two-wish thing."

Pa said, "No point in wasting a wish, if we don't have to."

I said, "You reckon if we got it on the stone boat the jenny mule might haul it?"

"She might," Pa said. He stroked his chin and considered. "Yep," he said, sizing up the pot of gold, and the stone boat, and the jenny mule. "I declare I do think she might. Provided she had a dose of seasoning juice to aid her." He wiped away a

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smile, sort of guilty-like, recollecting the day he'd given her a doctoring of seasoning juice to perk her up from feeling poorly.

Ma said, addressing Pa by his complete name, "Oh, Eph Pirtle!" Like you'd say, "Lord have mercy!"

Pa said, "Now temper down. Firstly," he said, holding up a thumb and finger and ticking them off, "I said a *dose* of seasoning juice. Not a fill of it. And, thirdly, leave the rest to me." He spit clean across the Hollow, and stood rocking back and forth and popping his galluses.

"What happened to secondly?" Easter wanted to know.

GrandPa said, "Heh?"

Sukey said, EASTER SAID WHAT HAPPENED TO SECONDLY?"

"How should I know?" grandPa snorted. "He wasn't in my regiment."

Ma said, "You plan to go on that stone boat ride, don't you, Eph?"

Pa said, "Yep." And, to Easter, "That's secondly." And, to me, "Take your foot out of the lard bucket and sling it here."

Ma said, "Eph, mark my words, one of these days your tomfoolishness is going to backfire and no mistake. Ain't you ever going to quit pranking with Providence?"

Pa said, virtuous, "I never pranked with Providence in my entire life."

"Is—that—so," Ma said. "How about at the Reunion when you set off the dynamite and sent fourteen hounds, twelve pies, nine watermelons, three cousins, and a kettle of burgoo flying turn-turtle clear across the yard. And the time you invented the jumping shoes out of bedsprings and gun powder and didn't get teetotally untwisted for a month. And it wasn't but a week ago you tried to hypnotize a live bear and—"

"There wasn't a lick of sense in trying to hypnotize a *dead* bear," Pa interrupted. And, before Ma could speak, "As for this here proceedings, I'll bet you it *don't* backfire. Anything you care to mention. Go ahead."

Ma said, "You mean it?"

Pa said, expansive, "Yep."

Ma thought, and said, "A slim-handle curl-fingered back-scratcher to hang on the wall with a ribbon, like cousin Tilly's. No," she said, changing her mind, "I'll take a looking box. It prettys a room better.

"A looking box," she repeated, seeing it to herself—raisined with twinkly bits of glass and shining like a vision. "No," she said. "Let me think. Anything I want, you say? *Anything?*"

Pa bowed real elegant, pretending he had a plume in his hat. "Anything your heart desires," he said. "You name it."

"Regardless?" Ma asked him. "Promise. No matter what."

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"I promise," Pa said, genial. "Choose. Time's a-wasting."

"I choose you should take us all on a trip into *Town*," Ma said. Just like that!

Well, I don't know who of us was the most thunderstruck. *Town*. I know about *Town*. We all did, on account of as how cousin Tilly was eternally putting on airs about the time she'd been, and what-all she'd seen, and done, and ate, and so on. But I'd never counted on seeing *Town* my very own self. From what I'd heard cousin Tilly tell, it was hard to believe . . . one crossing-place after another. And in the very middle was a circle where a fellow, like me, could practice witching from umpteen crisscross directions at once, and not use up half the combinations.

"*Town!*" Pa said, in a voice like he'd stepped on a cottonmouth snake.

"You promised," Ma said, firm. *Town*."

"*Town?*" Easter said. "Gee, can we eat in a calfeteria, like cousin Tilly did? Can we, Pa? Can we?"

"Stores," Peonia said, hugging herself.

"Elevators," Sukey said.

Luke said, "Maybe we could buy us a auto-mobile." And Duke said, "And go to one of them barber's shops."

"A auto-*m*obile," Pa said, reflective. And he slapped his knee. "Agreed. A trip in to Town."

When we'd all quit shouting and turning somersaults and stuff, Pa let me tote the seasoning juice back from the Hiding Hatch because, in a way, it was my lard bucket. I don't know what's in seasoning juice, but it sure is a delight to slosh it. Sparkles, and whizzly sizzles, and glinty tingling bubbles, and little bright bursting pops fizz up and, if you give the bucket a reverse twist, its almost like July Fourth.

The jenny mule smelt it coming and me and Sukey and Peonia and Easter had to head her downwind with her nose in a damp gunny sack while Luke and Duke helped Pa struggle the pot of gold on to the stone boat.

The stone boat is a drag on runners, like a sled, that you pile stones and stumps and roots on when you're clearing a patch. Pa had fashioned it low, so he wouldn't have to hoist any more than need be—and built it sturdy, to endure—and aged it in Mountain Dew, to make it limber. As a consequence, it was stout as a live oak and whippy as a willow switch and, as he hadn't put it to much service, good as new. Same with the jenny mule's harness, which was salt-cured rawhide strips plaited together and rubbed with snake oil until they was black as sin, and strong and tough as a wild old billygoat. Pa can't abide to make a think slipshod. Even if he don't intend to use it.

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When us children was roosted in the trees to Ma's satisfaction, Pa tugged his hat tight, settled his pants, sluiced the juice around to get it good and lively and allowed the jenny mule at it. She drunk it without a pause and when she was finished she stood there, wall-eyed and splay-legged, breathing like she was about to shriek.

Pa took his own sweet time getting set on the stone boat. He can gauge a thing to a T and shave it so fine he has you jangling, but the jenny mule didn't appear to be in a rush. She just stood there kind of spraddled, breathing and blowing. I'd almost concluded either Pa had undercalculated or the seasoning juice was losing its strength, when she threw back her head and brayed. And, for a hair raising second, I thought Pa had gone and *over*done it.

I'll bet you there wasn't a living creature within hearing distance that didn't freeze shivering in its hide to wonder what new and awful varmint was roaming the mountain. Ma said, later, that her spine rolled right up her back like a fern.

The hounds, who'd been nosing at a possum hole, bristled like porcupines and my dog, Chigger, the one who can talk, said, *"Je-ru-salem!"* and streaked for home with the pack ki-yi-ing behind him in a blur of tails and legs . . . and a bluejay, fussing at us, toppled off its perch, horrified, and treaded air with its feathers everywhichway until its wings took hold. At the rate it was traveling, when it left, it arrived in Chinaland along towards sundown.

A little bluewhite jaybird feather floated down and, in the gathering silence, Pa's voice was positively happy. "Gee-up," he said, snugging the pot of gold between his knees, and slapping the jenny mule's rump with the lines. *"Gee*—gee-*up*, you ornery-natured trifling slab of sidemeat. *Gee-up!"*

The jenny mule glanced back at Pa as if to say, "Prepare to meet thy Maker," and flattening her ears she shook herself together, haunched, straightened out, and got navigating. There was a *whump* as the stone boat begun moving, and a whoop from Pa, and away they went close to the ground, going like a lit fuse and grinning from ear to ear—him and the jenny mule both. Up the slope, over the rise, and out of sight. And us after him.

We could hear him a-hooting and urging on the jenny mule and, now and again, we'd catch a wild, zigzag glimpse of him zipping through a place like a fork of greased lightning but, mostly, he was a terrible unseen commotion on ahead. Once there was a sliddery, cracking crash and Ma wailed, "He's done for!" But when we reached where it was, there sat a black and white woods pussy

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square on its fanny with its hind feet stuck out like a person's, shaking its head dazed and astonished. And where Pa had slewed to avoid it there was gashes and splits all over Luke and Duke's persimmon tree, and his hat on a topmost branch.

"Well, he ain't killed," Ma said, drying her eyes on Boo Baby's dress and lengthening her stride, since it's not advisable to hesitate in the immediate vicinity of a woods kitty—especially one that's going to be violent in a mighty few seconds.

"But he deserves killing," she said, listening to her chickens squawking as he hit the yard. "He ought to be skinned and sold for a bounty," she added, as pieces of woodpile flew into view high in the air, companied by a joyous cheer from Pa.

She'd no sooner spoke when there was a queer, curious, double clap of noise, like twin explosions, followed by a smash and a dull, earth trembling *thunk.* And then quiet, except for the ruckus the chickens was raising.

Ma, white as a spook, screamed, "He's a goner!"

Seemed to me it took us a year to gain the yard, though it wasn't but a matter of minutes. It was like when I was a tot and tumbled in Panther Creek and got caught below the surface on a sunk snag. I remember, plain as plain, how purely dreadful it was—fighting to get free, and thinking I wasn't ever going to see my folks again in this world, and how nice behaved I'd be forevermore if I could wiggle loose and not drown. Until I discovered I was breathing underwater. I remember I was so surprised that I dang near did drown from trying to reason out what method I was using. I never have reasoned it out, to this day. I can just do it, someway.

Anyhow, we got there at last . . . Ma screeching, and Sukey bawling, and Peonia and Easter blubbering, and Luke and Duke and me trying not to and making a sorry job of it.

The yard looked like it'd been stirred with a stick and thrown up for grabs, and leaning smiley against the trunk of a chinaberry was the jenny mule. A hoop off the bashed-in rain barrel wreathed her neck and a ribbon of smoke curled out of her nose. Sitting on the pot of gold was Pa, somewhat tattered but not hurt a whit, eating a persimmon.

He said, "Howdy."

Without a word and in one smooth motion, Ma put Boo Baby down and picked up a dead pullet and fired it at him.

Pa ducked and said, "Now, girl. There's no argument. You said it'd backfire. It did, and I admit it." He jerked a thumb at the jenny mule. "Backfired and sneezed. Simuletaneous, you might say."

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Ma said, "Don't you 'now girl' me. Look at this yard. Look at it! Just *look* at it!" and she flung another chicken.

Pa dodged and said, mild, "Pitching the deceased poultry around ain't going to neaten it none. And what's a dab of mess when we have us a fortune to show for it."

Ma said, and she was riled, "What's the good of that gold when you'll have us all lifeless before we get the using of it. I wish it was spending money and I wish it was stashed away and I wish—" She stopped, her eyes as big as pies, because the pot of gold was gone from under Pa and he thumped to the ground.

"The wishes," Ma gasped. Her fingers crept to her lips. "I used up both the wishes," she whispered. She sank to a stump and put her face in her apron and bent to and fro.

Pa got up and comforted her. "Why, bless Ben," he said, patting her, "it ain't worth weeping about."

Easter said, "Shucks, Ma, what's there so marvelous about a pot of gold?"

I said, "It's not like we needed it, Ma. Gosh."

Luke said, "Little Joe's right, Ma. Don't cry. We don't care if it's gone," and Duke said, "Heck no."

Peonia said, "Here, Ma. You can have my squirrel." And Sukey said, "And you can have my red beads."

"What's ailing daughter?" grandPa asked.

Sukey said, "THE POT OF GOLD IS GONE AND SHE FEELS BAD."

"Well, why do she feel bad?"

"BECAUSE THE POT OF GOLD IS GONE."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"SHE THINKS IT WAS HER FAULT."

"What was?"

GrandMa said, "Never mind. No harm done."

"That's what I figured," grandPa said.

Ma raised her face out of her apron. "I'm not sorrowing," she managed. And she wasn't. She was laughing fit to bust.

Pa stared at her as if she'd taken leave of her wits and, then, he slapped his knee and turned tail and beat it into the house. There was a sound from inside like a bear clawing at a bee tree, and Ma nearly split her sides. While us children was blinking puzzled at each other, Pa appeared in the doorway.

"It's there!" he yelled, throwing handfulls of green paper money in the air. "In stacks! In the mattress!"

And, of a sudden, everybody was laughing, harder and harder and harder, and harder, until we was weak and wobbly and flopped in heaps.

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So, tomorrow, we're going to *Town*.

And Pa says, as an extra reward, I can take Chigger along. Chigger is so excited he keeps running in rings yelping "My!" Me, too.

When I think of that circle where the crossing-places meet, I can hardly wait.

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXI

In 3180, Ferdinand Feghoot found the planet called Pigg. It was worthy of note, not because all its species were civilized (which is common enough), but because the spirits of its dead remained visibly present for years, getting into the same sorts of scrapes they had when alive. This troubled the living, who were convinced that there was no way to help or console them.

Feghoot saw an example as he was taking a stroll with the President. A little ghost-cat crept up, weeping and wailing.

"Th-th-that old gh-gh-ghost B-Boxer bit off my t-t-t-tail!" he told them, sobbing and blowing his nose.

"Oh, dear, dear, *dear!*" the President moaned. "And there's *nothing* at all we can do!"

Feghoot paid no attention. Kneeling, he whispered some words. Instantly, the cat-ghost leaped happily up, thanked him politely, and dashed off purring a tune.

"How splendid!" the President cried. "Mr. Feghoot, what did you *say*?"

"I told him to go to a grog shop."

"A *grog* shop, but why?"

"Because," said Ferdinand Feghoot, "that is where they retail spirits."

—GRENDEL BRIARTON

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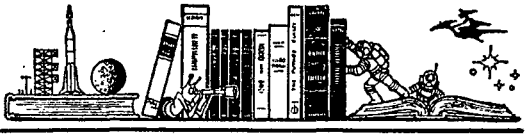
BOOKS



Near Misses From All Over

by Damon Knight

THE FAILURE OF MOST RECENT s-f novels to say anything new and important, or even very interesting, makes a novel like Brian W. Aldiss's VANGUARD FROM ALPHA (An Ace Double, with CHANGELING WORLDS, by Kenneth Bulmer, 35¢), flawed as it is, worthy of note.

Aldiss writes pointed, dry, highly styled short stories that pack a great deal into a small space. His novels, those we have seen so far, are pot-boilers. This one opens with a dispirited comic-book sequence: three young spacemen, all with identical clean-cut faces and empty expressions, are sent up to the Moon to investigate something mysterious going on near the Rosk installation there. I'll explain the Rosks in a moment. In a scrimmage, Tyne Leslie is knocked out, and when he comes to, in the spaceship on the way home, Murray Mumford tells him that he, Murray, saved Tyne's life after the third man, Alan Cunliffe, panicked and threatened to shoot Murray if he didn't leave Tyne behind. Tyne refuses to believe this story, and makes up his mind to find out the truth.

Now. The Rosks are immigrants from another star, vaguely Malayan-looking humanoids, who by threats and diplomacy have managed to get themselves allotted a district in Sumatra, and another on the Moon, and to become a Rosk Problem. The exasperating complexity of this problem, compounded by stupidity, nationalist short-sightedness and other human traits, makes it all too believable: and the ambiguity of the Murray situation makes it equally interesting. If Murray is not telling the truth, what did happen on the Moon while Tyne was unconscious? And if Murray is lying, why such a clumsy lie?

Then we get another comic-book sequence, in which Tyne,

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after being delayed at the spaceport, charges off after Murray without stopping to tell anybody anything; *and* meets a mysterious undercover agent in a bar, *and* gets knocked over the head and abducted in a taxi. . . . The rest of the chase, which takes Tyne to Padang, a Rosk hideout, a desert island, and to some hair-raising cliffhangers in a big automated plankton plant, alternates more or less regularly between thoughtful analysis and pointless action.

But even in his comic-book writing, Aldiss is more perceptive than most. The final solution of his puzzle is ingenious and reasonably satisfying; his future world has at least touches of reality, because it's as idiotically patched-together and complicated as our own. And at times, Aldiss's gift for phrasemaking triumphs over his plot. Two samples:

"The ocean (. . .) lay there flat as failure, stagnant and brassy."

"Absolute poverty, like absolute power, corrupts absolutely."

If this writer ever does a novel with his right hand, it will be something worth waiting for.

Edmund Cooper is another British writer whose short stories, so far, have been more rewarding than his novels. His latest movie, SEED OF LIGHT (Ballantine, 35¢), has a fatuous plot in which all the British statesmen are heroic idealists and all the Americans clowns and demagogues. The writing is gassy, with an almost incredible concentration of cliches in places. For contrast, Cooper has had the gall to interpolate this fuggheaded screed with passages from Ecclesiastes and Revelation.

Put in charge of the first manned satellite (for some impenetrably idealistic British reason), a mystic and a Communist argue over whether to bomb all satellite bases, or just all but the Soviet Union's. In the event, it doesn't matter, because they start World War III anyhow.

Dissolve to a generation or so later. All that's left of Earth's human population is in a few glass-roofed cities, all of which are now building spaceships in a frantic effort to escape the lingering death of the planet. (They build these spaceships inside the city domes, in such a way that the takeoff of each ship will probably mean the death of everybody left behind. This seems pretty asinine, but let us pass on.)

Well, these gigantic spaceships are to support generations of travelers, but the original complement of each is to be just ten—five men, five women. By "recycling their biological material" over and over, they can exist indefinitely without further supplies of food. We fade out on a scene from the Hollywood version of WHEN WORLDS COL-

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LIDE. Now we meet the crew of one starship, all of whom take silly-ass names on joining the crew (the men take the names of famous scientists, the women those of cities—presumably on the theory that if you ruled out courtesans and actresses, there wouldn't be enough famous women to go around), and we settle down to a dismally uninventive rewrite of Heinlein's UNIVERSE.

All this changes radically c. page 130, when a third-generation mutant named Kepler tries to unite his own telepathic powers and those of his two wives, in an attempt to explore the precognitive memory of a newborn child—with the object of finding out beforehand whether Procyon will prove to have habitable planets, so that if not, the expedition can save years by turning aside earlier. This venture and its sequel have a Stapledonian sweep; the characters are as stiff and artificial as ever, but now they have found their milieu. Even Cooper's soggy prose seems to take on dignity. From here until the end, the book holds up beautifully; the closing chapter is a little sticky, but not enough to matter.

THE WORLD THAT COULDN'T BE, edited by H. L. Gold (Doubleday, $3.95) contains at least two stories that ought to be required reading for s-f fans: "A Gun For Dinosaur," by L. Sprague de Camp, and "Once a Greech," by Evelyn E. Smith.

"A Gun For Dinosaur" is first-rate de Camp, the kind of thing the old master can still turn out when he takes his time. The background of this Cretaceous hunting story is faultlessly laid in; so are the three main characters; the whole thing, like the best of de Camp's early work ("The Isolinguals," "Hyperpilosity," "The Merman," &c.) is cool, ironic and controlled.

"Once a Greech" is pure, deadpan farce by one of the funniest writers the field has produced. Miss Smith's spaceship is manned by a museum collection of classic British bores, esthetic, mystic, disciplinarian, humanitarian, all kinds. The ghosts of previous solemn stories on this interplanetary theme drip gaudily, like punctured rainbows, around the author's head as she works.

Not counting a story of mine, the rest of the collection (Gold's sixth volume of *Galaxy stories*) ranges from a surprisingly impressive account of exploration on Mercury by Alan E. Nourse ("Brightside Crossing"), through a competent story by Mark Clifton and a regrettable misfire by Edgar Pangborn ("The Music Master of Babylon"), to three ham-handed entries by Clifford D. Simak, F. L. Wallace and Richard Matheson.

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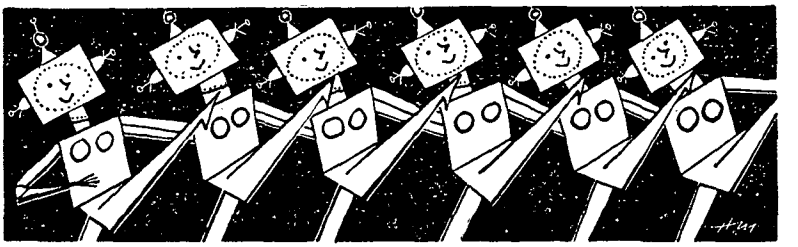

THE SEEING I

by Charles Beaumont

NOW, IN THE MIDST OF THE general—and generally incredible—science fiction depression, there is just cause for rejoicing. For finger-crossing and breath-holding, also, plus perfervid prayers to all the available gods. On October 2, 1959, a new television series will be launched. If it is anywhere nearly as successful as certain powers are betting it will be, then the dream of every green-blooded s-f fan will come true and we'll have, for the first time, decent science fiction and fantasy drama available on a regular basis. If, by any chance, the series should turn out to be as successful as these powers *hope* (still even money), then something like a revolution will occur. At this stage I cannot imagine any force puissant enough to drive out the westerns and private eyes, but Paladin and Gunn may soon find themselves vying in a three way struggle for public favor.

The series that will spark this revolution, if it first sparks the great American TV audience, is called THE TWILIGHT ZONE. When I first heard about the project, many months ago, I dismissed it with the same keen intuitive sense that led me to dismiss the early Hammer films. I'd been exposed to similar schemes. The Ziv company had tooted its wild tin horn over a new series called WORLD OF GIANTS, which publicists had described as "an ingenious continuing science fiction story." Joining the herds of excited s-f writers, I trampled over to the studio and discovered that the aforementioned ingenuity applied strictly to the manner in which the good producers had lifted Richard Matheson's THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN.

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WORLD OF GIANTS was nothing more than a cheap adventure series featuring an FBI agent who was six inches tall and traveled in a suitcase but was otherwise undistinguished. Hiring everyone (except, of course, Matheson) to cook up stories for their absurd character, the impresarios of this ill-starred vehicle spent several hundred thousand dollars, then shrugged and wrote the whole mess off to taxes and experience. Prospective sponsors had pole-vaulted away from the show. Which was the greatest, if not the sole, indication of intelligence among the TV advertisers thus far.

To those who have had dealings of any nature with Hollywood, it will come as no surprise that the failure of this dismal bouillabaisse caused other studios to drop their plans for science fiction projects, summarily. The connection seems invisible, but it happens that Ray Bradbury was on the verge of concluding a deal for his own series, titled REPORT FROM SPACE, and that it collapsed shortly after the WOG debacle. My own CHARLES ADDAMS THEATRE, which had the blessing of the Master, died mysteriously. THE HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN went up in smoke. THE VEIL was dropped. All other s-f, fantasy and supernatural experiments were cancelled. And I thought, as did everyone else, that we had reached the end of the road without ever having set foot on it.

Then along came the news about THE TWILIGHT ZONE. There were no trumpets, no kettle-drums, not even the usual two-inch headlines. Just a simple notice, buried in the Trades, to the effect that the eminent TV writer Rod Serling was preparing "a series of imaginative stories." Nothing more. Is it any wonder that we scoffed? What did Rod Serling know about the field, anyway? Sure, he could rip off an occasional Emmy-winning PLAYHOUSE 90 script, but did that give him any right to invade our demesne?

Answer: Yes.

With great misgivings, and after a suitable period of grousing about outsiders and why didn't the networks buy *our* shows, we—Richard Matheson, Ray Bradbury and I—agreed to discuss the possibility of joining the program. I don't know what we expected Serling to be like, but we were all surprised to find that he was a nice guy who happened to love good science fiction and fantasy and saw no reason why it shouldn't be brought to the screen (or tube). My own resentment vanished during that first meeting. But I still had doubts. Serling's talk was good, but what about the scripts? The first nine were written by him, based on his story ideas. Wasn't this a bit cheeky? ("Yes," said Serling. "However, I

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had no choice. My promise to write most of the scripts was a very big factor in the network's acceptance of the project.") I took the nine home with me, determined to hate them.

Now it is axiomatic that nothing galls a science fiction pro more than to see "an outsider" bumble into the field, rework a whiskered theme which, in his naivete, he takes to be supremely original, and make either, or both, a fortune and a critical splash. There are those of us who will never understand the success of Schute's pallid ON THE BEACH; those of us who, in the deepest abysses of our hearts, wish the man writhing ill for fattening himself on a repast prepared by others. There are dozens of end-of-the-world stories by toilers in this special vineyard, and most are superior to the BEACH party. But they are labeled "science fiction" and so must remain buried in the vaults, attics and garages of the faithful few.

Thinking these poisonous thoughts, I read Serling's first script. It was, or seemed to be, an end-of-the-world story. Resisting the impulse to throw the wretched thing across the room, I read on. A man is alone in a town which shows every sign of having been recently occupied. He finds cigarettes burning in ash trays. Stoves are still warm. Chimneys are smoking. But no one is there, only this one frightened man who can't even remember his name . . .

Old stuff?

Of course. I thought so at the time, and I think so now. But there was one element in the story which kept me from my customary bitterness. The element was quality. Quality shone on every page. It shone in the dialogue and in the scene set-ups. And because of this, the story seemed fresh and new and powerful. There was one compromise, but it was made solely for the purpose of selling the series.

The second script concerned a prison planet and a mechanical woman.

The third was about a man who returns to the village of his youth and finds nothing changed.

The fourth concerned an unusual pact with the devil . . .

At midnight, when I'd finished reading the material, I knew that Serling was an "outsider" only in terms of experience; in terms of instinct, he was a veteran. Bradbury and Matheson read the scripts also, and in very little time we all decided to join the TWILIGHT ZONE team.

It's been exciting work. Serling and his associates Buck Houghton and William Selph are doing their best to make this a first rate production, and with CBS and two important sponsors behind them, that's the kind of production it's turning out to be. The budget is among the highest for half-hour

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dramas. Very little corner-cutting goes on. If a script calls for a collapsing building, then a building is seen to collapse and no nonsense about it. Nor is there any problem about directors and performers, either, as so frequently is the case in television, for a circle of excitement surrounds the show. People want to be associated with it. Among the names connected with segments already finished or about to go before the cameras: (directors) Emmy-winners Robert Stevens and Jack Smight ("Eddie"), Robert Parrish, Mitchell Leisen, Robert Florey (about whom later), and John Brahm ("The Lodger," "Hangover Square"); and performers David Wayne, Gig Young, Kenneth Haigh (star of Broadway's "Look Back in Anger"), Dan Duryea, Richard Conte, Ed Wynn, Ida Lupino, Paul Douglas, and Inger Stevens. Authors whose original stories have served as spring-boards for scripts include Lucille Fletcher ("The Hitchhiker"), Paul Fairman ("Brothers Beyond The Void"), Lynn Venable ("Time Enough At Last"), and George Clayton Johnson ("Rubber Face").

A single example (chosen because I know it to be true) will suffice, I think, to indicate the quality we may expect. My *Playboy* story, "Perchance to Dream," was selected for production a few months ago. Serling told me to dramatize it but to make no changes. He advised me to forget everything I'd learned about television taboos. They didn't exist on TWILIGHT ZONE. I should do the script the way I saw it, without any thought to the old lady in Dubuque, "who probably has a lot more taste than she's given credit for."

Believing the instructions to be well meant but hardly to be taken seriously, I nonetheless did write the script precisely as I saw it. To my amazement, it was happily accepted. Nothing was changed. Not one line. Not one word. Not even the wild technical directions, which called for an impressionistic amusement park, a roller coaster ride and an automobile crash.

It was filmed exactly as written. I know because I was on the set, watching, unable to believe that any of it was truly happening. I'd done over thirty teleplays and seen them spoiled by the hundred-handed companies. But it *was* happening. An author was seeing his work treated with respect.

The director of "Perchance" was Robert Florey, a horror expert who counts, among other projects, a little thing called "Frankenstein" —for which he conceived the idea and wrote the screenplay, in collaboration. Throughout the TV filming, he strove for quality. It might have been the most expensive MGM feature. He rooted out

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the meaning of certain lines, frequently surprising me with symbols and shadings I'd neither planned nor suspected. The set was truly impressionistic, recalling the days of "Caligari" and "Liliom." The costumes were generally perfect. And in the starring role, Richard Conte gave a performance which displayed both intensity and subtlety.

Matheson reports that the same sort of care was shown in the filming of his "Disappearing Act" (from *Fantasy and Science Fiction*), "Third from the Sun" and "Flight."

If the show fails, it won't be because we haven't tried. Everyone at CBS is pulling for the project. Because everyone knows that with the success of TWILIGHT ZONE, we will enter a new era of TV entertainment. Even now, producers all over Hollywood are waiting, poised, ready to jump aboard. They only want to see whether it's a band wagon or a funeral cortege.

Me, I'm optimistic.

If you are, if you believe, with me, that a really top grade show of this kind *must* succeed, then I'd suggest that you begin making out lists of the stories *you'd* like to see dramatized. And keep those fingers crossed!

Random notes: For *Frankensteinophiles,* Robert Florey offers this choice bit of information. Having made a lot of money on "Dracula," Universal decided, in 1931, to do another horror story. The trouble was, no one could think of anything sufficiently horrible. Florey, who was employed on the lot, had read Mary Shelley's book and suggested it to the then Grand Panjandrum, Carl Laemmle. The old man shrugged. Laemmle, Junior, thought the title was "impossible. Who could remember it?" Finally the story editor of the studio communicated his enthusiasm, and they decided to go ahead with the project. Florey set about revising the classic. It was he who blocked out the shape of the picture, and invented the Monster as we know and love Him. (For the sake of nostalgia, a dummy Monster appears in "Perchance.") Florey can't remember exactly where he got the idea of raising Karloff into the lightning, but he can tell you about the genesis of another memorable scene. "I was living on Ivar Street, then," recalls the director. "It was late at night and I couldn't sleep, so I went out walking. They had just built a new restaurant in the neighborhood, called Van de-Camp's. It had a blue windmill. I stopped walking and thought, you know, something could be done with a windmill . . ." And who among us can forget *what* was done with that windmill! Florey, a soft-spoken, modest man with immense eyes and a scholarly

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air, was originally set to direct "Frankenstein." The famous British director James Whale was on hand, however, and he insisted that they give him the assignment. Such was his reputation, and salary, that Universal had no choice but to accede to his demands. (Florey admits that "Jimmie did a good job.") Also set was Bela Lugosi, for whom the entire project was begun. He was to play the Monster. But at the last moment he backed out, claiming that the role, a non-speaking one, was a come-down after "Dracula." . . .

Riding for a fall debut is a series called SPACE. It will be a semi-documentary treatment of man's conquest of the moon. I know nothing else about the show except that submissions from science fiction writers are not particularly welcome. According to producer Bob Leach, the s-f boys can't seem to keep their feet on the ground. A bunch of dreamers. Always coming up with wild-hair ideas. (You mean like rocket ships carrying men to the moon, Mr. Leach?) . . .

Of the continuing cataract of so-called science fiction movies, it can only be said that the question, "Where do you go when you reach rockbottom?" has been answered. You go sideways. Hammer Films, as we now know, flattered but to deceive. "The Horror of Dracula" contained a few rewarding scenes but was generally a tasteless chowder. All subsequent films from the well-intentioned company have been uniformly embarrassing. The latest, "The Hound of the Baskervilles," is a ludicrous travesty on Doyle's splendid tale, and should particularly be avoided by all those who remember the Universal-Rathbone-Bruce original—a far superior treatment of the subject. . . .

Speaking of Rathbone, he does himself proud in a new album entitled "Basil Rathbone Reads Edgar Allan Poe" (Caedmon TC 1028). As a rule I avoid "spoken records" for the simple reason that I seldom play them. This is an exception. Rathbone's reading of "The Black Cat" and "The Masque of the Red Death" is, in a way, like Klemperer's reading of Beethoven's *Ninth:* it reveals new depths, new subtleties on each subsequent hearing. . . .

The same is true of Boris Karloff's loving interpretation of "Kipling's Just So Stories" (Caedmon TC 1038), though I must say that this is a somewhat specialized treat. To some, Kipling was a great master of the art of childhood fantasy; to others (in which group I count myself), he was an insufferable hack, forever writing down to "little minds." Children today do not much care for Kipling (excepting, always, his admirable JUNGLE BOOK) and I think this is why. Lewis Carroll didn't write

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down, whatever his intentions might have been, and neither did Kenneth Graham or L. Frank Baum. They knew instinctively that there is no mind quite so incisive and demanding of logic as a child's. . . .

I have heard that there is a motion picture called "The Woman-Eaters." I refuse to believe it.

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When a distinguished author such as Robert Nathan turns his hand to science fiction, the result is likely to be something unexpected and different. On the other hand, it is not at all unexpected that the author of ONE MORE SPRING, PORTRAIT OF JENNIE, *and so many fine others should produce such a deft, delightful and double-edged melodrama as*

A PRIDE OF CARROTS: or, Venus Well Served

by Robert Nathan

ACT ONE: *Scene 1*

(The scene is a blank plain on a distant planet. Could it be Venus? Who knows? But on the other hand, why not? In the background there is an appropriate, mysterious scene of hills or mountains, rocks or grottoes, done by an imaginative scenic-designer. The set is simple; the wings of angels must not be clipped, producers must be comforted; High School auditoriums and summer theatres must be kept in mind. We go forward from there.

(A moment after the curtain rises, two space-travellers float slowly downward, attached to parachutes. They are from earth, and suitably attired; one of them holds a ray-gun in his hands, the other carries a walkie-talkie. They land, gaze about them, and at each other. They are alert, alarmed, and ready for anything. One of them bends down, and picks a daisy. As he does so, it gives a squeak of agony. He doesn't notice the squeak; he studies the daisy. Then he takes his helmet off.)

1ST VISITOR: (*Taking a deep breath.*) Flora. So there's air. (*Breathing.*) Quite good air, as a matter of fact.

(The second man takes off his helmet. We now meet the two visitors—first, U. S. Navy Air Force Commander Brian Potter, and second, the well-known news

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commentator, Alfred Caudle. It is Caudle who carries the walkie-talkie.)

CAUDLE: Where are we, do you think?

POTTER: (*With firm satisfaction.*) On Venus, obviously. The air is pure, wind moderate, w. to s.w., visibility good.

CAUDLE: (*Into his walkie-talkie.*) Calling NBC, Earth. Calling NBC, Earth. Come in, Earth.

POTTER: (*Unwrapping small American Flag, and naval ensign.*) I now claim this planet for the United States of America, and the Fifth Fleet.

CAUDLE: Wait a minute—wait a minute. I have to make my own claim. (*He unrolls the flag of the State of Texas.*) In the name of the sovereign state of Texas (that's in case we find anything submerged) and my sponsors, Southwest Oil, Surely White Tooth Paste, Heidelberg (Wisconsin) Beer, and Bar B-Q-Dog Food. Calling NBC. Come in, Earth.

(Both men plant their flags in the ground. They are much moved. They look at each other; then they gravely shake hands.)

CAUDLE: This is a solemn moment, Commander.

POTTER: It is, Caudle. The first men on Venus.

CAUDLE: It's a curious thing; I thought I heard a squeak when you picked that daisy.

POTTER (*troubled*): Did you? . . . To tell you the truth, I did too. I thought it was static in my ear-phone.

CAUDLE: Come in, NBC. What sort of people do you think we'll find, Commander?

POTTER: I don't know. Could be very like ourselves. Not a naval community, I fancy.

CAUDLE: It's a funny thing. I can't raise Earth.

POTTER: Probably hit a dead spot somewhere.

CAUDLE: Oh, fine. I'm on a coast-to-coast hook-up in less than two hours. With seven new sponsors—and I can't get NBC!

POTTER: They can't blame you for that. The main thing is—we got here! Well—*I'm* going to explore. I think perhaps you'd better stay here so as not to lose each other. I'll just take a look around—see what's over those low hills.

CAUDLE: (*Seating himself on a rock.*) Don't be too long, Commander. I confess, I feel a little nervous . . . not knowing what might come out of the bushes.

POTTER: You can have my ray-gun, if you like.

CAUDLE: What will *you* do?

POTTER (*calmly*): Run like hell. (*He tosses the ray-gun to Caudle, and walks off.*)

(Caudle, after gazing about him uneasily, sets himself to adjust his walkie-talkie. A gryphon enters quietly, R. He is a combination of horse, rooster, and sabre-tooth tiger. He approaches Caudle.)

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GRYPHON: (*Half clearing his throat.*) Hrmm! (*It is a horrid sound.*)

(Caudle leaps half off his rock. He turns to look at the gryphon, and all but swoons in terror.)

CAUDLE: A . . . get away, you monster! Where's my gun? Potter! Help!

GRYPHON: I *beg* your pardon?

CAUDLE: Potter! Potter! How do you shoot the damn thing? Hel . . . What?

GRYPHON: I said, I beg your pardon. Are you ill?

CAUDLE: You . . . you talk!

GRYPHON: Naturally. Why not? So do you. Haven't I seen you somewhere before?

CAUDLE: Certainly not!

GRYPHON (*thoughtfully*): I've seen you somewhere . . . I have it! On NBC—the Cradle Hour.

CAUDLE: But . . . that's television! That's my program.

GRYPHON: Exactly. That's where I've seen you. You're Caudle.

CAUDLE: Do you mean to say that our television reaches to . . . that you have . . . that . . . that there's television on Venus? (*Into the walkie-talkie.*) Come in NBC —for heaven's sake!

GRYPHON: Venus? What do you mean, Venus? You're from Venus. Up there. (*He points.*)

CAUDLE: But that's Earth. Come in, Earth!

GRYPHON: Nonsense . . . *this* is Earth. At least . . . we call it Earth. And we call that Venus. Apparently you call *that* Earth, and *this* Venus. Well . . . that's semantics for you. Silly, isn't it. What is your word for . . . for miscegenation?

CAUDLE: Why . . . inter-marriage, I suppose. *Mesalliance.*

GRYPHON: We call it cross-pollination. And what would you call a group of carrots?

CAUDLE: A bunch?

GRYPHON: Good heavens! A bunch? A pride of carrots! That is, of course, on this side of the border. And a gaggle of onions. But if you were on the other side . . . it would be an exaltation of onions, and a deceit of carrots. Semantics, you see.

CAUDLE (*bemused*): I see. I see.

GRYPHON (*modestly*): A charm of gryphons.

CAUDLE: You are a . . . gryphon, I take it?

GRYPHON: Of course. Rather highly placed, as a matter of fact. You see the gold collar? (*He shows Caudle his collar.*) I belong to the Secretary of the Interior. My name is Fido.

CAUDLE: And he . . . ?

GRYPHON: A very able carrot. Quite famous . . . for his wife's tassel. You've seen ordinary carrots, no doubt . . . with their tops? But this is a most unusual tassel. Blue. Everyone is copying it.

CAUDLE (*slowly*): A female carrot, with a blue tassel. And you have television?

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GRYPHON: Oh, yes, indeed. The Secretary's entire family tunes you in every Sunday night. They never miss a program. That's where I saw you . . . I have no set of my own, of course.

CAUDLE: I can't get NBC . . . How does it happen that you, an animal, are bound as a sort of servant to a . . . a vegetable?

GRYPHON (*simply*): One has to eat.

CAUDLE: (*With a shudder.*) Vegetables?

GRYPHON: Lord, no! Dried seeds . . . truffles, marzipan . . . you look a little like marzipan yourself. Do you mind if I try . . . ? (*He takes a nip out of Caudle's rear.*)

CAUDLE: Ow!

GRYPHON: Mm. Delicious. But definitely not marzipan. What is it?

CAUDLE: Meat, you fool!

GRYPHON: You don't say! Meat? I never saw meat before.

CAUDLE: You're meat yourself.

GRYPHON: I am? No! Splendid. (*He takes a bite out of his own arm.*) Ow! That hurt!

CAUDLE: Of course it hurt. Now stop it. And go find your master, and—tell him I'm here. You say he's a carrot?

GRYPHON: Naturally. What else *could* he be?

CAUDLE: I want to meet him.

GRYPHON: He'll want to meet you, too. There are one or two things that puzzle us—

(He goes away, and Potter returns.)

POTTER: I say, Caudle . . . there's a whole field of wild flowers . . . anemones, I think . . . just over that rise . . singing like birds!

CAUDLE (*glumly*): I know.

POTTER: You know?

CAUDLE: We had a visitor. It seems . . . we're in some kind of vegetable world . . .

POTTER: A vegetable world? . . . Good heavens! I say, Caudle—you're not a vegetarian by any chance, are you?

CAUDLE: No . . . Thank heavens. I can take them or leave them alone. Still . . . in a sense . . . you're right, of course When I think of vegetable soup . . .

POTTER (*sharply*): Forget it! Don't think of it! And when we meet these . . . onions—or carrots—or whatever they are . . . remember . . . we've never eaten anything but . . . air . . . in our lives.

CAUDLE: They probably wouldn't mind our having eaten caterpillars . . .

POTTER: Air, Caudle, air. It's safer. Till we look around us.

CAUDLE: They've looked at *us* already, I'm afraid.

POTTER: The devil you say!

CAUDLE: They've seen me on television.

POTTER: (*startled*): They have? Then we *can* get through to Earth. . . .

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CAUDLE (*disconsolately*): Sure. How?

POTTER: Ask somebody!

CAUDLE: How do you ask a carrot?

POTTER: Cheer up, old man. It could be worse. In the navy you meet all kinds of people. I've met vegetables before.

(There is a choral-like sound of women's voices; and a middle-sized carrot enters L., carrying a water-dowser's hazel twig, all in gold. He comes up to Caudle, and pushes him gently out of the way.)

CARROT: Pardon me, sir.

(The wand bends down; at which the carrot gives a whistle, and an oversized market-basket is wheeled in by two other carrots. In the basket is a large male carrot, with a fine green tassel on his head, and an attractive female carrot, with a blue tassel. The dowser points to the spot; the two servant carrots wheel the basket over, and then stand back; and the large male carrot gets out, by opening a wicker in the side.)

THE LARGE CARROT: Good earth beneath me . . . ? Moist?

DOWSER: Yes, sir.

CARROT: (*Giving his hand to the blue tasseled carrot.*) Come, my dear. (*She steps down, beside him.*)

(The two servant carrots reach into the baskets, and bring out a bowl of water which they place carefully near their master, and two thorn bushes in pots which they place on either side of him. Then, and then only, he turns toward Caudle and Potter.)

CARROT: Welcome; to our planet. (*He bows; the lady curtseys; and Caudle and Potter both bow.*)

CAUDLE: Thank you.

POTTER: In the name of the United States Navy . . .

CAUDLE (*hurriedly*): Later, Commander, later. Your majesty . . . that is, your majesties . . . ?

BLUE TOP: (*She has a lovely voice.*) We're not majesties. There are none here. This is a republic; like Texas. My husband is Secretary of the Interior; his name is Edwin and I'm his wife, Edwina. And you're the famous news commentator, Alfred Caudle; and you're Commander Potter. We saw your take-off, and we watched your trip . . . though we lost you when you rounded Mars. Otherwise, we should have been here to greet you.

CAUDLE: Madam, you can perhaps conceive the feelings with which Commander Potter and myself gaze for the first time at this unfamiliar scene . . . the first mortal eyes to . . . glimpse these mountains, distant not only in space, but . . .

EDWIN: We are perhaps immortal?

CAUDLE (*confused*): No, no . . . . . I meant . . . I mean to say . . . the first travellers in space . . . The first . . . the first men.

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EDWIN: No insult meant, no umbrage taken. Continue.

CAUDLE (*unhappily*): I find myself somewhat at a loss, your Excellency.

EDWINA (*gently*): You must be weary, Mr. Caudle . . . and you, Commander. And hungry, perhaps. What food would please you? That is . . . if we have it. What do you like to eat?

CAUDLE: Air.

EDWINA (*puzzled*): Air? Well . . . there is plenty of that. Are you thirsty? For what?

POTTER: Water will do very nicely, madam.

EDWIN (*surprised*): Water! My dear . . . the man wants water.

EDWINA: Does he want it over him . . . or would he like to stand in it?

POTTER: I'll just drink it, if you don't mind.

EDWINA (*uncertainly*): Of course. (*She motions to one of the servants.*) Adalbert . . . Bring the gentlemen a cup of water . . .

(Adalbert reaches into the basket for a cup, fills it from the water pot, and hands it to Potter, who takes a swallow, and looks surprised.)

POTTER: It has a kind of taste . . . not unpleasant.

EDWINA (*cheerfully*): We've been . . . ah . . . sitting in it, I'm afraid . . .

POTTER (*smiling*): To your health . . . both of you. (*He drinks the remainder.*)

CAUDLE: Mysterious are the ways of the Lord. Having made man in His own image . . .

EDWIN: What?

CAUDLE: I said . . . The Lord having made man in His own image . . .

EDWIN: Why man, in particular?

CAUDLE: It says so. In Genesis 1-26.

EDWIN: Ah? But surely . . . the Lord, of whom you speak . . . and by whom, I imagine, you mean the Creator . . . must Himself be the root of all things— No?

CAUDLE: In a sense, of course . . .

EDWIN: Exactly. God is a root. *You* don't look in the least like a root. (*Turning to his wife.*) Does he, my dear? Do they?

EDWINA: Not at all. He has no stalk. (*Brightly to Potter.*) Did you think you did?

POTTER: I'm afraid I never gave it much thought, ma'am.

EDWINA (*gently*): You should think about it. We're very down-to-earth people here, I'm afraid. Very literal. We have to be. The rabbits would have had us, otherwise . . . long ago.

CAUDLE: How did you prevent it? . . . If you don't mind my asking.

EDWIN: I don't mind telling you it was touch and go, for a while. But then we managed to drop a few seeds inside a thorn bush. After a while we moved out . . .

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and took the thorn bush with us. That was long ago, of course . . . when we had only the rudiments of a brain. But it was more than the rabbits had. From the tufts of rabbit wool left hanging on the briars, we made our first clothes. That fooled them completely. We left them to polish off the lettuces, and began our development. As you can see, we use the thorn as a badge of authority.

EDWINA: How did *you* develop?

CAUDLE: I think we hid in trees.

POTTER: Nonsense. We evolved from the sea. The mammal, or milk-secreting vertebrate . . .

EDWIN: Er . . . pardon me, Commander . . . Later, perhaps? There are certain rules of hospitality— The leaders of the nation, the carrot-tops themselves, are waiting to greet you, with appropriate exercises. There will be entertainment by some very well-known vegetables; and speeches by the Heads of State, including myself. My speech is being written for me at this very moment, by a talented young parsnip in the Bureau of Agriculture. So—with your permission . . .

EDWINA: Just a moment, Edwin. Your daughter . . .

EDWIN (*sharply*): What about my daughter?

EDWINA: She is on her way here.

EDWIN: Damn.

(A sound of galloping is heard, and a moment later the gryphon comes trotting on L.—with a charming young female carrot on his back. She slips to the ground, and greets the travellers with a wave of her hand. Her name is Alice.)

ALICE: Hi!

(Caudle and Potter bow. Edwin sighs heavily.)

EDWINA (*graciously*): This is our daughter, gentlemen; Alice, allow me to present you to our visitors from space, Mr. Caudle and the Commander Potter.

ALICE: I know all about them, Mother. Welcome to Carrotania, gentlemen.

EDWIN: I have already welcomed them, my dear.

ALICE: You don't understand the animal kingdom, father. They'd much rather be welcomed by a young girl.

EDWINA (*shocked*): Really, Alice! Where do you learn such things?

ALICE (*calmly*): At school. It's all in Zoology One.

'Spring, the sweet Spring, is the year's pleasant king;
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring,
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-wit-ta-woo!'

EDWIN: For heaven's sake, Edwina . . . !

CAUDLE: Well, Well!

ALICE: I know another one, too . . .

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'The blessed Damozel lean'd out
From the gold bar of Heaven.
Her blue grave eyes were deeper much
Than a deep water, even.
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.'

They really do like young girls, father: You claim to be so realistic . . .

EDWIN: Oh . . . all right, all right . . .

EDWINA: (*To Alice.*) That's enough, dear. We were just going to escort them back to town . . . you can go with us if you like. But try to control your high spirits. We're all a little edgy, I'm afraid —this last day of waiting has been —well, after all, they could have landed in Onionapolis!

ALICE: But they didn't. The onions didn't get them—we got them . . . I like the Commander. He's cute.

POTTER: Well—thank you very much!

EDWIN: Oh God! . . . Come on, Edwina! Gentlemen . . .

(Edwin steps back into the basket, followed by Edwina. The servants take up the bowl of water and the two pots of briars, and wheel the basket off.)

POTTER: I suppose we'd better follow . . . ?

CAUDLE: Lead the way, Commander . . .

ALICE: (*Coming between them, and linking her arm in both of theirs.*) My parents think I'm quite mad. I'm not really. I watch television all the time. I should like to be a great actress, and help to sell cigarettes. Do you think that's abnormal?

POTTER (*heartily*): Not where I come from.

ALICE: I like you, Potter. You interest me. (*To Caudle—with charm.*) You too, of course . . . shall we go? Come along, Fido.

(They leave, arm in arm, followed by the gryphon.)

ACT ONE: *Scene 2*

(*I have changed my mind about High School auditoriums; this play will be too rich for them.*

(*The scene is the private office, or study-and-Star Council-room of the Secretary General of the Party, in Onionapolis, in the United Socialist Republic of the Leeks and Onions. Naturally, it is underground. The Secretary himself, O'Dor, a very large white onion, is seated at his desk; while before him sits, in humble mien, a leek.*)

O'DOR: You say they have landed. How do you know?

LEEK: We have it on the best authority, sir—the underground—

O'DOR: They have not landed in our own Onionland, or in the Republic of the Leeks.

LEEK: No, sir.

O'DOR: They have dared to

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land near Carrotapolis. That is a grave oversight on the part of our security police.

LEEK: Unfortunately, our side of the planet was turned away from the direction from which they came, and so they landed on the back side.

O'DOR: The back side. Hmmm. See what you can do with that, Spindle.

LEEK (Spindle): Yes, Little Father.

O'DOR: However—exchanging insults with the carrots isn't going to bring these space-men over to our own side. And we must have them, Spindle. We must get hold of their technical skill; we must have their know-how—before the carrots get it. Or else . . . (*He makes a motion indicative of "it is finished—kaput."*)

LEEK: Yes, Little Father.

O'DOR: It is ridiculous—is it not?—that we, who invented television, jet propulsion, the atom bomb, and the bicycle, should be deprived of these two men who could tell us how to use them—? That our marvellous studies in science, and our never-to-be-challenged will for peace, should be frustrated by the fact that two men, arriving from distant space, had the misfortune to land upon our planet's behind, and are now the guests of our mortal enemies, the carrots! (*He rises, and holds up his clenched fist.*) Death to carrots!

LEEK: (*Doing likewise.*) Death to carrots!

(They sit down peacefully again.)

O'DOR: By the way—when you write to Carrotania again, ask Edwin to send us 20,000 more tons of bone meal, and ten of leaf mold for the spinach beds.

LEEK: He writes that he'd like about fifteen carloads of ammonium sulphate.

O'DOR: At the usual price?

LEEK: Yes . . .

O'DOR: Hmm—ammonium sulphate is a war material, Spindle.

LEEK: Are you sure, sir?

O'DOR: You could lose your head for that remark. I am *always* sure. The mere fact of my saying it, makes it so. If you do not understand this, Spindle, you do not understand the making of history. This great truth alone, within two generations, will conquer the world. To *create* truth, Spindle—*that* is the great thing! Not merely to go looking for it—have we ever used this sulphate in a war?

LEEK: Not to my knowledge, sir.

O'DOR: Good. Good. Then we are the first to discover that it is war material. Add 20% to the price.

LEEK: Yes, Little Father.

O'DOR: And bring me those scientists from the planet they—erroneously—call Earth.

LEEK: How am I going to do that, Little Father?

O'DOR: This I leave entirely up

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to you. There are ways—of the shanghai, the kidnap, the finagle, the seduction . . .

LEEK: With an onion?

O'DOR (*dangerously*): What is the matter with an onion? A sweet, Spanish onion . . . ?

LEEK (*floundering*): Well . . . it is only that . . .

O'DOR: This also could cost you your head, Spindle.

LEEK (*meekly*): Yes, Little Father. We will do it with an onion. . . . Unless—

O'DOR: Yes? Unless?

LEEK: Nothing . . . I had a thought, suddenly; but it is better if you don't know it—then you are innocent, no matter what.

O'DOR (*excitedly*): Of course I am innocent! Already I deny it! I deny it categorically! It is altogether the fault of Carrotania! . . . Did you suggest otherwise?

LEEK (*hurriedly*): No, Little Father—no indeed.

O'DOR: I do not dislike you, Spindle.

LEEK: Oh—thank you, sir—

O'DOR: Therefore you have a future. At least, for a while. But you still have things to learn. One: The head of the state is always right; he cannot, by his very nature, be anything else. A Secretary General who is wrong is unthinkable. It is the same as saying: an onion without his rings. So—since he cannot be wrong, and must be right, he must also be innocent. All of which comes under the heading of being right. Right?

LEEK: Right.

O'DOR: Two: The United Socialist Republic of Leeks and Onions is a land of peace and freedom, mother of the arts, and home of the sciences. We allow no difference of opinion; therefore there is freedom, for no one interferes with what is allowed. Our artists enjoy the happiest of lives, painting onions; and our scientists have already three times turned biology, zoology, and the entire metaphysics of the universe upside down, and back again. When you can understand all these points, and add them together, you can see how silly it is to argue about whether ammonium sulphate is war material . . . or had we gone on from there?

LEEK: Yes, Little Father. We were talking about a sweet Spanish onion . . .

O'DOR: You know one?

LEEK: I do, Little Father.

O'DOR: A nice one, hey? With a silky skin? No wrinkles . . . ?

LEEK: Like ivory.

O'DOR: And very Spanish? You know what I mean . . .

LEEK: Exactly . . .

O'DOR: Hot and sweet . . .

LEEK: Like a tamale—

O'DOR (*Clicking his fingers.*) With those castanets—

LEEK: And what a dancer!

O'DOR: Very Spanish. Sweet and hot. Languorous, hey?

LEEK: Melting . . .

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O'DOR: (*Suddenly coming to.*) What are we talking about?

LEEK: I don't know, Little Father. Was it about the planet's behind?

O'DOR: N-o . . .

LEEK: I know. It was about the space-men. The men from the planet they call Earth.

O'DOR: That's it. I knew it. Well, then—what are we waiting for? Off you go; and bring them back with you. Death to carrots!

LEEK (*rising*): And—the little Spanish number?

O'DOR: Send her in to me.

LEEK (*meekly*): Yes, sir. (*Lifting his fist.*) Death to carrots.

(He goes out. As he goes out, he is passed by General Shallot, who enters. The general wears a colorful uniform, and is much bemedalled. He lifts his fist in greeting, and is greeted by the General Secretary in return.)

SHALLOT: Etcetera.

O'DOR: Etcetera. Come in, Shallot. Sit down. (*Shallot seats himself.*) What news from the front?

SHALLOT (*comfortably*): Which front, Comrade?

O'DOR: (*He'd much rather be called Little Father.*) Any of them. All of them.

SHALLOT: We are continuing our tactic of embarrassing the enemy at all points. So far, we have caught twenty-seven violators of our territory. Naturally, we have been obliged to cross the border; in some cases we were forced to go as far as fifteen miles inside carrot territory, in order to be violated.

O'DOR: Were these carrots armed?

SHALLOT: Who knows? *We* were.

O'DOR: Well—there it is—a clear case of provocation. We will send the usual protest.

SHALLOT: Exactly, Comrade.

O'DOR: You *could* call me Excellency. Or Little Father.

SHALLOT (*proudly*): I am a descendant of the garlics. A garlic does not call *anything* Excellency.

O'DOR (*hastily*): I was only joking. Ha ha ha. Here we are all comrades! *All* excellencies . . . Little Fathers. Except Leeks. Now I will tell you something. As you know, the Earth-men landed today in Carrotania.

SHALLOT (*Lifting his fist.*) Death to carrots!

O'DOR (*likewise*): Likewise. By the way, Shallot—what are you doing tonight?

SHALLOT: Imperialistic warmongers! Nothing.

O'DOR: Capitalist swine! Come to dinner.

SHALLOT: Love to. Continue, Comrade.

O'DOR: Should they not have landed here?

SHALLOT: Possibly.

O'DOR (*outraged*): What do you mean, possibly? We are going to bring them here!

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SHALLOT (*gravely*): Hmm—that may not be so wise, Comrade.

O'DOR: And why not? Don't you want to learn how to set off guided missiles? How to fly a jet?

SHALLOT: That is not the point, Comrade; the point is—do we want to lose our right to make complaints? Such things are weapons, too—the very best weapons. They cost nothing. And they create an atmosphere—an odor—it is a real onion odor.

O'DOR (*slowly*): I see. Then you are opposed to the kidnapping of these Earth-men . . . ?

SHALLOT: Definitely.

O'DOR: Very well. I will think about it. You can go, General. (*As Shallot rises.*) By the way, I have news for you. You have been promoted to Field Marshal.

(Shallot clicks his heels, bows, lifts his fist, and gives a loud bellow.)

SHALLOT: Strength to onions!

O'DOR: See you at dinner. Eight-thirty sharp.

(Shallot goes out. O'Dor reaches into his desk, and brings out a phone. He dials.)

O'DOR: Hello—Secret police? General Shallot has just left my office. Liquidate him.

ACT ONE: *Scene 3*

(A garden in Carrotopolis. It is evening. Alice, and Herbert, a young carrot captain, are discovered in each other's arms.)

ALICE: *(Breaking away.)* Herbert . . . we're mad.

HERBERT: Angel!

ALICE: (*Rather matter-of-factly.*) Mad. Wildly, ecstatically mad. Do you love me?

HERBERT: Madly.

ALICE (*languidly*): Life is a bag of peat-moss . . . Haven't we done all this before?

HERBERT: Only once.

ALICE: And you enjoy it enough to do it again?

HERBERT (*uncertainly*): Ye-es . . . I think so.

ALICE: Life is so boring, Herbert. Love is so seasonal. I must ask Brian if it's seasonal where he comes from.

HERBERT (*jealously*): Brian?

ALICE: The navy man. Potter.

HERBERT: What would he know about love? He has no blossoms.

ALICE: He must have *something*. . . . Love is so dull, Herbert. All those flies, everywhere you go.

HERBERT: Bees, darling. Not flies—bees.

ALICE (*petulantly*): What's the difference? They have wings. Love has wings, Herbert—here today, and gone tomorrow. Brian has wings. He wears them on his uniform. He says they're Navy wings. Do you think the Navy is love, Herbert? Oh . . . but you wouldn't know; you're in the Army, aren't you?

HERBERT: Kiss me!

ALICE: If you like. (*They em-*

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brace.) I think perhaps I'll dye my top. Blue, like mother's. If I were blue, would you dye yourself blue, too, Herbert?

HERBERT (*hoarsely*): Anything. Anything at all.

ALICE: Would you love me if I were blue?

HERBERT: Any way. Any color at all.

ALICE (*regretfully*): It's hardly worth doing then, is it? I wish I could find something exciting to do!

HERBERT: You could marry me.

ALICE: You know Father would never allow it.

HERBERT (*sadly*): I know. That's what—would make it exciting.

ALICE: I want to live. Dangerously. Before we're all wiped out by some horrid blight—I want to taste the delights of . . . Herbert!

HERBERT: Yes?

ALICE: What does meat taste like?

HERBERT: How do *I* know?

ALICE: Brian is meat. So is Mr. Caudle. Fido told me.

HERBERT: By Jove! The animal kingdom! So they are.

ALICE (*dreamily*): He said they're very good.

HERBERT: Getting married would last longer.

ALICE: It's so comfortable here, at Mother's. Of course, I'm madly —wildly—in love with you . . . (*They embrace.*) but I *do* like having somebody turn down my bed for me at night . . . and bring me breakfast in the morning . . .

HERBERT: If only there were a war going on!

ALICE: That's the most selfish thing I ever heard! You haven't the least regard for anybody . . . Don't touch me. (*Turning to go.*)

HERBERT: But Alice . . .

ALICE: I hate wars; they upset everything. (*Turning to him again . . . with sudden passion.*) Herbert! Promise me there won't be a war!

HERBERT: But darling . . .

ALICE: Promise!

HERBERT (*helplessly*): Well—it isn't up to me, you know. I'm only a captain . . .

ALICE: (*Turning away indignantly.*) So that's what all your talk of loving me amounts to!

HERBERT: Alice . . . !

ALICE: Don't touch me! I'm going to find a nice cool moist sandy place, and sit in it.

(She goes out; with a despairing gesture, Herbert follows her. A moment later, Edwin and Caudle enter.)

CAUDLE: But I don't understand, Your Excellency—if the onions don't want your land—and you say they have plenty of their own—and don't want your oil, or your heavy industries . . . what *do* they want?

EDWIN: They want us to be onions.

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CAUDLE: But that's absurd.

EDWIN: Of course it's absurd.

CAUDLE: And they'd go to war for that?

EDWIN: No one actually knows. Of course, they don't say so. What they want is for everybody to be round, and white, and onions. When as a matter of fact, the only possible thing for everyone to be —if they're to have a decent kind of life—is long and crisp and carrots. Now *that's* something worth fighting for! Liberty. Freedom. The good life. And private enterprise . . . with the proper controls, of course. We have to keep control of chlorophyl. Can't let *that* get into private hands!

CAUDLE: The planet is pretty well divided between yourselves—and them?

EDWIN: Just about.

CAUDLE: Evenly—would you say?

EDWIN: Oh . . . we're strong enough, if it comes to that. As a matter of fact, we've been experimenting with a new shallow oil fryer—though so far it's only in the drawing-board stage, because of not having an onion to try it on. But just the same, a war now, at this point, would be the worst thing in the world—for both of us. For one thing—neither of us could afford it; and before it was over, we carrots would have whiskers, and *they'd* be scallions. And besides . . . (*In a low grave voice.*) I think they plan to use nematodes. It's a race suicide, of course.

CAUDLE: Nematodes . . . ? Let me think a minute—aren't those the tiny worms that all but ruined the citrus in California back in the forties?

EDWIN: I don't know about citrus—it isn't exactly my line. Down here—they eat vegetables. A kind of virus. Too small to see . . . we've tried to outlaw them, but—*they* won't agree to it. That's what makes me think that . . . Well, it's all a mess. We'll wipe each other out, and then the spiders can take over. But it's sort of sad to think that no one will even remember us. No mulch any more. No bone meal. No clothes made of rabbit's fur. No chlorophyl. . . . Just spider webs. All over.

CAUDLE: Ugh! You know—I think we had a way of fumigating for nematodes back in the States. I'm not sure if it worked. I could find out—if I could only get through to NBC.

EDWIN: You can't get through . . . ?

CAUDLE: No. And it's particularly strange because I understand there's good reception here.

EDWIN: Maybe you've been jammed.

CAUDLE: But why? Who would jam me?

EDWIN: Who knows? *They* might, I suppose. We could send you out ourselves, of course, on a planet-to-planet hook up . . .

CAUDLE (*eagerly*): Could you?

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That would be terrific . . . wait a minute. How come we've never had you on our screens at home?

EDWIN: We've never broadcast to you.

CAUDLE: But you get ours . . . ?

EDWIN: My dear Mr. Caudle, the vegetable world is, upon the whole, modest, and even shy. We are not aggressive. We broadcast to the insects, and even to the birds; but not, as a rule, to the animal kingdom. Our experience with the rabbits, you know. . . . Perhaps we overdo it a little. Consider it an idiosyncrasy. I should be delighted to arrange a broadcast for you. Particularly, if you could find out anything about fumigating . . .

CAUDLE: 'Good evening Mr. and Mrs. North and South America, and all the slips at sea' . . . (*He laughs happily.*)

(Potter and Edwina enter.)

CAUDLE: Mr. Potter—Commander! We're going to broadcast!

POTTER: No! Splendid. I'll get to work on my report right away—or are we going to ad lib?

CAUDLE: Better type the report. You can ad lib to your wife.

EDWINA: You have a wife, Commander?

POTTER: Yes, ma'am. Every Navy man, over a full Lieutenant, has one.

EDWINA: A woman, I suppose?

POTTER: Oh, yes, ma'am. Definitely. She has to be.

EDWINA: What is your wife like, Mr. Potter?

POTTER: Why . . . er . . . she's a female . . .

(He tries to explain with gestures. Edwina repeats his gestures with bewilderment.)

EDWINA: You mean . . . like this? How very . . . odd. Bumpy.

POTTER: (*embarrassed*): Yes, ma'am.

EDWINA: *You're* not bumpy.

POTTER: No, ma'am.

EDWINA: (*thoughtfully*): I see. Is that how you tell your own from the others?

POTTER: How do you tell one carrot from another?

EDWINA: No two carrots are alike. There are a thousand differences . . .

POTTER: To a carrot. It's the same with us.

EDWIN: Of course, my dear! Remember the rabbits? They all looked exactly the same—but they did seem able to recognize one another. And onions! They're just a faceless mob, as far as I'm concerned.

CAUDLE (*hopefully*): To get back to the broadcast . . .

POTTER: Right! What about it?

CAUDLE: If you ask *me*, I think it calls for a bit of a celebration—our landing the way we did . . .

POTTER: And being received so kindly—

(All bow.)

CAUDLE: It's a pity we have no champagne.

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EDWINA: Champagne? What's that?

CAUDLE: A kind of bubbly wine.

EDWIN (*frowning*): Wine is from grapes, isn't it? Friends of ours. Relatives.

EDWINA: I'm not sure I like this at all!

POTTER: We could break out our emergency rations.

CAUDLE: The very thing!

EDWINA: Cousin Muscat! Aunt Malaga! Uncle Zinfandel!

(Potter reaches into his pocket and brings out a tin box. He opens it, and extracts a can.)

POTTER: Here you are. A can opener?

CAUDLE (*Bringing one from his pocket.*) Right . . . (*He takes the can, and reads the label.*) For emergency only. U. S. Navy. Concentrated carrot juice.

EDWIN (*thundering*): What?

POTTER: Oh—oh . . .

EDWINA: I think I'm going to faint.

EDWIN: Carrot juice? Guards! Seize those men! They're onions!

(The guards rush in.)

ACT TWO: *Scene 1*

(*The library in Edwin's place in Carrotopolis—which is, not unreasonably, the capital of Carrotania. What will a carrot's library look like? There would be paintings of vegetables—ancestors and friends—on the walls; and the head of a large rabbit over the fireplace. The usual thorn bushes, and an ornamental pot of water. Beyond that, I am not prepared to go.*

(*Edwina is sitting on a small couch, knitting. Edwin is pacing up and down the floor. The gryphon lies in his basket, near the fireplace.*)

EDWIN: I tell you, my dear, it's a most uncomfortable pickle. These—mean creatures—are dangerous. At the same time . . . they *could* be helpful to us. If—I say *if*, they were peacefully disposed. . . . But *are* they peacefully disposed?

EDWINA: From what I've seen on television, they do enjoy a great deal of shooting, Edwin. And one does get the suggestion of a certain amount of—shall we say coarseness?—in their literature. One wonders.

EDWIN: One does; one does indeed. Still . . . this thing about fumigating; it could turn out to be very helpful. Very embarrassing to the other side.

EDWINA: They *do* drink wine, dear. I didn't like that at all.

EDWIN: I know. And carrot juice. . . . It gave me a nasty turn. Of course—they don't look like onions . . .

GRYPHON: They don't taste like them, either.

EDWIN: You—tasted one?

GRYPHON: I did.

EDWIN: What did he taste like?

EDWINA: Was it sharp? Did it sting your nose?

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GRYPHON: No. It was rubbery, on the whole—no crackle to it. No crispy-crunchy quality at all.

EDWIN: You see, my dear—

EDWINA (*uncertainly*): Y-yes. Still . . .

EDWIN: Your daughter seems rather attracted to them.

EDWINA: To the naval one. He has a wife.

EDWIN (*puzzled*): So? What has that got to do with it?

EDWINA: With what, dear?

EDWIN: With—with . . . I mean to say, what has his having a wife got to do with—with what he is? Or isn't?

EDWINA (*placidly*): Nothing, darling. Nothing at all. It seems it's part of the regulations. I just thought I'd mention it.

EDWIN: Well, don't. All you do is confuse me. . . . I feel that we could learn a great deal from him. And the other one. That is—if they aren't onions.

EDWINA: I don't know what we could learn from the other one, dear—except, perhaps, why the little man on television tries to sell us toothpaste. Or do you think he could tell us why there are wars?

EDWIN: Who?

EDWINA: Why—Mr. Potter, of course.

EDWIN: Don't be silly, Edwina; *no*body can tell you why there are wars. There just are, that's all. They're a necessary part of the economic structure. They provide a—a sort of enzyme to the body politic. Besides, we have to sell our bone meal . . . which reminds me; I must make a note to raise the price again . . . what with the higher cost of living. No, my dear—please don't meddle in what doesn't concern you. As long as there's no actual fighting . . .

EDWINA: Then why are they in prison? The two men, I mean—

EDWIN (*simply*): Security. The first duty of a Minister of State is to make sure that his country is secure.

EDWINA: I see. And his daughter?

EDWIN: What the devil has his daughter got to do with it?

EDWINA: She's growing up, Edwin.

EDWIN (*testily*): Of course she's growing up. Why shouldn't she grow up? Is there anything wrong with that?

EDWINA: Really, Edwin—a person can hardly open her mouth these days, without your jumping down their throat.

EDWIN (*grumpily*): Well—I'm sorry. I'm a little edge, I guess. Maybe I'd better take Fido out for a walk.

GRYPHON: Uh—uh. I did it before I came in.

(Edwin sits down, and passes his hand wearily over his forehead.)

EDWIN: Besides—this broadcast—

EDWINA: I think it would be quite exciting. . . . Would we be

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asked to speak, do you think?

EDWIN: I don't know. We might. Possibly.

EDWINA: Will it be telecast?

EDWIN: I—suppose so.

EDWINA: (*Glancing up at her blue top.*) I think it should be done in color. . . . I'll have the dressmaker in tomorrow. Something in blue, perhaps . . . I'm so glad that Alice had her teeth straightened . . . You see, I was right: I *told* you the elocution lessons were a good idea.

EDWIN: Wait a minute . . . I'm not giving a show. I want information—on vital matters. Military, and economic. Social studies. Fumigation. What has that got to do with elocution lessons?

EDWINA: And all that poetry she learned . . . English. Very good. *Old* English. They say the old English is the best. Mr. Laughton, I think . . . a large gentleman . . .

EDWIN: For heaven's sake, Edwina!

EDWINA (*calmly*): Yes, dear . . . I know. You want to find out about nematodes; and about your new shallow oil fryer. But we're *not* at war—not exactly; and I don't know why you give me so little credit for intelligence. Alice, as I have said, is growing up. She has few opportunities to meet what I would call eligible parties . . . already I have detected certain looks between herself and that young captain—Herbert, I think his name is. Is there any harm in showing herself over a planet-to-planet hook-up? Who knows what might come of it? Since her teeth have been straightened . . .

EDWIN: Fido—I don't care whether you did or didn't—you're going for a walk!

(He stalks out, followed by a grumbling gryphon.)

ACT TWO: *Scene 2*

(*A cell, at night. There is a little light, but not much. Potter and Caudle are lying on their cots.*)

POTTER: You shouldn't have read the label, old man. That's what did it.

CAUDLE: How could *I* tell? I thought it would be chicken consomme . . . and just when I had the greatest broadcast of the Ages lined up! If only I could get through to NBC . . .

POTTER: What good would that do?

CAUDLE: They'd think of something. They'd appeal to Edwin's better nature.

POTTER: What *is* the nature of a carrot, Caudle?

CAUDLE (*miserably*): I don't know.

(The door of the cell is unlocked, and Herbert enters. He carries a lantern, which he sets on the table.)

HERBERT (*morosely*): There is

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a lady to see you, gentlemen . . .

(He steps aside, to allow Alice to enter. Caudle and Potter both rise.)

CAUDLE: Miss Alice!

ALICE: (*With her fingers to her lips.*) Sh! Not so loud. (*To the captain.*) Thank you Herbert. You can leave us now . . .

HERBERT: Mind you, Alice—this is contrary to your father's orders, and against my better judgment . . .

ALICE: I know, darling. It's divinely, utterly mad . . . run along, pet.

HERBERT: I shall wait for you outside the door. All you need do is scream.

(He goes out, and closes the door after him.)

ALICE (*gaily*): You wouldn't hurt me, would you?

POTTER: Glad to have you aboard, ma'am.

ALICE: I knew you wouldn't. (*She seats herself on one of the stools.*) They say that you're dangerous vegetarians. That you—*eat* carrots. (*She shudders.*) Do you really?

POTTER: Well . . . you see, ma'am . . .

ALICE: I don't believe it. Anyway, I sent the guard away; there's only Herbert. We're all alone . . . practically.

POTTER: And you're not afraid?

ALICE: You're much too nice to eat poor little me!

POTTER: Thank you, ma'am.

CAUDLE: You, yourself, are a vegetarian, Miss Alice.

ALICE (*indignant*): I'm not. I'm a vegetable. It's not the same thing at all!

CAUDLE: Just answer me this: What will happen to you when you die?

ALICE: I'll be buried—of course. In the National Compost Heap.

CAUDLE: From which the rich, steaming soil is taken to nourish the young carrots . . . right?

ALICE: Of course—

CAUDLE: Which then—which then, mind you—must of necessity feed upon your decayed flesh—from which, I might add, the spirit has long since fled—

ALICE (*bemused*): Why . . . of course. Why—how clever you are. I *am* a vegetarian, aren't I? Or, at least—I was. And of course, the new little carrots still are . . .

CAUDLE: Not only that. Cannibals!

ALICE: How madly amusing! Cannibals. You're perfectly right. I really did eat my—my grandparents, didn't I? (*Her face falls.*) I missed mother and father, though.

POTTER: I should hope so!

ALICE: Oh—but don't you see—? The whole *point* lies in eating one's parents! Why—it solves *everything.* It would be so satisfying to a young girl's psyche to have her father under her belt . . . as it were . . . wouldn't it?

CAUDLE (*surprised*): Have you been through analysis?

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ALICE: Of course. Haven't you?

CAUDLE: Yes . . .

ALICE: It's so nice to be able to talk the same language, isn't it . . . (*She rises, and begins to move restlessly around the cell.*) Whose parents *did* I eat, I wonder?

CAUDLE: An idea, merely. A parental symbol.

ALICE: *My* analyst says symbols don't satisfy . . .

CAUDLE: We must look to the Oedipus . . .

ALICE: My analyst says the trouble is my mother has a blue top.

CAUDLE: Exactly. The active competition of an adult parent . . .

ALICE: It tends to make me aggressive.

CAUDLE: Naturally. Feeling that your mother has an unfair advantage . . .

ALICE (*to Potter*): Kiss me!

POTTER: Eh? What?

ALICE: Kiss me!

POTTER: Good Lord!—Really . . . I . . .

ALICE: Are you afraid? It isn't even Spring. I don't come into blossom till July.

POTTER: I know. But . . .

ALICE: Am I not beautiful? Am I not to be desired? By the Navy?

POTTER: Oh yes! Yes indeed! But . . .

ALICE: I could have your head, Potter. On a silver tray. Like Salome. I will kiss your mouth, Iokanaan . . . Potter.

POTTER: I know. But . . .

ALICE (*softly*): I could set you free . . .

CAUDLE: For heaven's sake, kiss her, and get it over with.

POTTER: But . . .

(She kisses him. Potter draws back, and looks around dizzily. He turns, and kisses her again.)

POTTER: (*Drawing a deep breath.*) Hmm. You smell so good. Like a grocery.

ALICE: (*Also a little dizzy.*) It feels like April. Is this love, Potter?

POTTER (*hoarsely*): How can I feel this way about a carrot?

ALICE: I feel a strange heat. Not like the sun . . .

POTTER: Like a garden. In the summer.

ALICE: I don't feel at all like a vegetable . . .

POTTER: I wouldn't have thought it possible.

CAUDLE (*indignantly*): Look. How about getting us out of here?

ALICE: Potter—say something! What has happened to us?

POTTER: I don't know. Wait.

(He brings out a small book, and leafs through it rapidly.)

ALICE: What is it, darling?

POTTER: Service Manual—

ALICE: Does it say something about us?

POTTER: Wait a minute—here it is (*reading*): 'They salute mutually, but in any case there should be no hesitation on the part of either, or delay in rendering the salute . . .'

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(They are about to embrace each other again, when Herbert sticks his head in at the door.)

HERBERT: Time is up, folks.

ALICE: Oh? . . . Yes . . . Is it? I suppose so. Must I go?

HERBERT: What's the matter? Don't you feel good?

ALICE: Of course, I feel . . . wonderful. Divinely, madly wonderful . . . goodbye, my Potter. Goodbye, darling. I'll be back. I'll be back quickly . . . to set you free . . . Don't forget me . . . you'll see . . .

(She rushes out. Herbert follows her more slowly, shutting the door after him.)

HERBERT (*disgustedly*): Oh, for heaven's sake!

(Caudle turns to Potter, and looks him over with enthusiasm.)

CAUDLE: Well—that's the Navy for you. What have you fellows got that I haven't got?

POTTER: Blossoms in our hair . . . I sure hope she gets us out of here.

CAUDLE: I have a broadcast to do. The biggest sponsor tie-up in history. Eleven hundred stations, including Liberia—and the State of Georgia. If I don't make it . . . (*He shakes his head gloomily.*)

POTTER: Cheer up, old man. You'll be there. You'll make it. She'll get us out all right—

CAUDLE: You really—like the girl, don't you?

POTTER: Yes.

CAUDLE: Well—it's none of my business, of course—but—what about Mrs. Potter?

POTTER: What about her?

CAUDLE: She isn't going to like this pretty vegetable of yours.

POTTER: Caudle—could you be jealous of a—a stalk of celery?

CAUDLE: I'm not married—

POTTER: But suppose you were?

CAUDLE: I don't know. Could be. If I found my wife in bed with it—

POTTER (*hotly*): We're not in bed yet!

CAUDLE: She doesn't blossom till July. It's only February.

POTTER: I wish we were safe at home. There's something frightening—about being in love with a carrot!

CAUDLE (*sniffing*): Smell anything, Commander?

POTTER (*uncertainly*): N—no . . .

CAUDLE: Funny . . . (*sniffing.*) I thought for a moment I smelled onions—

POTTER: That's not very likely . . .

CAUDLE: Just an idea, I guess . . . You know, it makes you think. Suppose God *is* a root?

POTTER: Then what are we?

CAUDLE: I don't know. (*Rubbing his eyes.*) My eyes are watering.

POTTER: Mine, too . . . You know I—*do* smell onions . . .

(The cell door opens, and Spindle and two other onions, disguised as carrots, appear.)

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SPINDLE: Gentlemen—

POTTER: Eh?— Who are you?—

SPINDLE (*bowing*): You are free, gentlemen—

CAUDLE: She *did* manage it, then!

SPINDLE: This way. Hurry, please—

POTTER: (*Rubbing his eyes*) Where is she? I can't see, very well.

SPINDLE: She is waiting for you, sir—

POTTER: Come along, then—Dammit, I'm crying.

(*He strides out, followed by Caudle. As Caudle passes Spindle, he stops to sniff.*)

CAUDLE (*suspiciously*): That's funny—(*Calling*) Potter!

(There is the sound of a blow beyond the door, and a groan. A leek steps up behind Caudle, and puts his hand over his mouth. At the same time, Spindle hits him over the head with a sap. Caudle goes limp; the leek supports him.)

SPINDLE: Good. Splendid. Take them both down the back way—Our agent is waiting with a market wagon . . . what about the other one? The carrot?

(The leek points; Spindle reaches outside the door, and drags into the cell the inert form of Herbert.)

SPINDLE: How fortunate that all the guards were withdrawn—except this gentleman. Run along, Comrade . . . I shall wait here. Who knows? Perhaps our snare will trap an even rarer prize . . .

(The leek leaves, carrying Caudle with him. Spindle closes the door, and sets himself to wait—a hunched and fateful figure. In a moment, Alice's voice, light and joyous, is heard outside the cell.)

ALICE: Potter! Caudle! Everything's arranged . . . !

(She bursts in—and stops short as she sees Spindle.)

ALICE: What?—Where's Potter? Who are you? That odor! (*She puts her hands before her eyes.*) My eyes—

(She sees Herbert lying on the floor; she stares at him a moment, then turns to Spindle, who makes a motion to reveal himself. Alice screams, and turns to run; it is too late. Spindle grasps her.

SPINDLE: Aha, my pretty little root—of the celery family . . .

ALICE: (*In a feeble croak.*) Help! Papa!

SPINDLE: It is useless to scream; there is no one to hear you. Or have you forgotten that you sent the guards home—yourself? Your Earth-men friends are already on their way to the Little Father in Onionapolis. In three days you will join them—in the dungeons of the Echalote.

ALICE: No . . .

SPINDLE: But first—there is a little experiment, with a petite marmite . . .

ALICE: Papa!

SPINDLE: Without the leeks, of course. Simply, the marrow-bone, and one carrot—

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ALICE: Oh!

(She swoons. Spindle stands looking down at her with relish, and rubbing his hands.)

ACT TWO: *Scene 3*

(*O'Dor's office, in Onionapolis. O'Dor is seated at his desk, with Spindle beside him. Before him, with bandages around their heads, sit Potter and Caudle.*)

O'DOR: So you see, gentlemen, we had no choice; the stakes were too high—being no less than war or peace. It was unlikely that the carrots would give you up of their own accord; and so, we simply—ah—took steps to expedite matters.

CAUDLE: (*Feeling his head.*) With a piece of iron pipe?

(O'Dor looks questioningly at Spindle, who shakes his head.)

O'DOR: My dear Mr. Caudle, we do not use pipe of any kind. Besides, my agents tell me that you went with them willingly, and without remonstrance.

POTTER: We were out cold.

O'DOR: Exactly. You gave no sign of complaint. We were obliged to interpret your silence as best we could. . . . Besides—you had no business in Onion territory.

CAUDLE (*indignantly*): We weren't *in* Onion territory!

(O'Dor looks at Spindle who shakes his head.)

O'DOR: Come, come, my dear Mr. Caudle. In the first place, your friend has just admitted that you were both of you unconscious; therefore, you couldn't possibly have known where you were. In the second place—where are you now? In Onion territory. Therefore, to argue about where you were, when you didn't know where you were, is unrealistic.

POTTER: All right; so now we know. What's all this about war and peace?

O'DOR: (*Sitting back, and placing the tips of his fingers together.*) Mr. Potter, it is a fact that of all the people of this planet, we onions are the most peaceful, the most freedom-loving, and the most cultured. Spindle—give Mr. Potter a sample.

SPINDLE: (*Rises; singing.*) 'On the Road to Mandalay, where the flying fishes play, and the dawn comes up like thunder over China cross the bay—'

O'DOR: That's enough. (*Spindle sits down again.*) So tell me, Mr. Potter of the U. S. Navy—how do you make war?

POTTER: How do we what?

O'DOR (*patiently*): Make war. How do you destroy whole armies—cities, countries with all their inhabitants? Without, at the same time, annihilating yourselves? Unfortunately, there is no blight that will make compost out of carrots without doing the same for onions. I have to think of my people.

SPINDLE: God bless you, Little Father.

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O'DOR: Thank you. (*He sighs.*) We are still in the drawing-board stage. We need technicians.

POTTER: Don't look at *me*. Count me out of that one.

CAUDLE: There's a very good program every Sunday afternoon, called "Do It Yourself." You could tune in on it, and get your technical advice that way.

O'DOR: We do not allow reception from the outside. That way, we do not get any wrong ideas. We listen only to ourselves.

POTTER: You won't get any wrong ideas from me, either.

O'DOR: My dear Commander, you must understand that the terms Right and Wrong can only be used in reference to the destiny of our people, and must be always at the service of Didactic Materialism. The End justifies the Means: when onions rule the world, who would wish to be celery? I offer you an important place in history.

POTTER: The only place I want to be is next to a girl with a carrot top who smells like a garden after rain.

O'DOR (*surprised*): *That* I did not expect. However—let us not grow emotional. Perhaps you are closer to her than you think. . . . Will you teach us to make war, Commander? You see—I am giving you another chance. Opportunity rarely knocks so often.

POTTER: I will not.

O'DOR: You will not help us to detonate the hydrogen bomb?

POTTER: Good Lord! *Have* you the bomb?

O'DOR: We have invented it . . . but we haven't been able to make it go off yet. You won't help us?

POTTER: I should say not!

O'DOR: Very well; I am sorry. Perhaps we will find a way to make you change your mind. There is a little experiment we have in mind—with a pot of boiling water. You would not care to see your—shall we say girl-friend? —floating about with only a marrow bone for company? No? . . . Ah well. Think it over. Spindle—take these gentlemen to the solarium, and entertain them. Show them the vampire marigolds . . . and the lizard-eating oleander. They might be interested to watch the muerte vine digest its daily mouse. . . . And on the way, send in the other prisoner. And now, gentlemen—if you please. (*He rises.*) We shall meet again. A pot of hot water. (*The other three also rise.*) I believe it is called a petite marmite. Good day to you.

SPINDLE: Come.

(Potter and Caudle follow Spindle out. O'Dor takes down a large atomizer of perfume, and sprays himself liberally; then he arranges his uniform; after which he seats himself at his desk, and bends a stern but lofty gaze at the door. It opens, and Alice enters. She is frightened and indignant. She

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stands in the doorway, silent and morose.)

O'DOR: Well, well! Come in—come in, young lady. (*As Alice hesitates.*) Don't be bashful—I won't eat you.

(He rises, and walks toward her. As she moves out of his way, he circles behind her and shuts the door. She turns to look; then resigns herself to her fate, and moves toward the desk.)

O'DOR: (*Walking around behind her, looking her over.*) Sit down, my dear, sit down. This is really a pleasure. (*Alice seats herself reluctantly in front of the desk.*) So you are Edwin's daughter. How is my dear friend, the Secretary of the Interior? He hasn't answered my last note . . . No doubt an oversight. I dare say he'll be glad to hear that you are in good health . . . still. But one never knows—does one? Here today, and gone tomorrow. Still, if one is smart . . .

ALICE: Why don't you say what you mean, and get it over with?

O'DOR: I am saying it, my dear. I am saying it. Give me time. . . . But that's the way with you carrots—so impulsive . . .

(Alice does not reply.)

O'DOR: (*After a moment's pause.*) Of course—we know that you have been quietly mobilizing for months. . . . I can't imagine why. We ourselves have only one wish—to be at peace with all the world. I suppose you wouldn't care to tell me the present whereabouts of the Carrot Eighth Army? (*No answer.*) Or the air force? We have ways of finding out, of course. But it would be so much easier if you were to tell us.

(Alice sits in tight-lipped silence.)

O'DOR (*carelessly*): By the way—your friend Mr. Potter was here. He just left.

(Alice is silent.)

O'DOR: Young people are so stupid. Their silence gives them away. Do you think we don't know about your little affair? Mr. Potter, also, was singularly uncooperative. Too bad. We might have to . . .

ALICE: You wouldn't dare!

O'DOR: No? Why not? Do you think we are afraid? After the protests we are accustomed to get from your father, nothing can frighten us. However—speaking of your father—we have not received the 20,000 tons of bone meal which we ordered. Why is that? Nor has he agreed to the necessary slight rise in the price of ammonium sulphate.

ALICE: Mr. Potter had nothing to do with it.

O'DOR: Possibly . . . possibly. But I cannot help but associate Mr. Potter's sudden arrival in Carrotania with this new—shall I say?—unwillingness to cooperate. There are ways, of course, of making people more willing. My assistant is showing Mr. Potter the muerte vines.

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ALICE (*horrified*): Not the meat-eaters!

O'DOR: Why not? Mr. Potter *is* meat—I believe? But of course . . . if *you* have something you would like to share with us . . .

ALICE: What do you mean? How? In what way?

O'DOR: (*Coming close to her.*) Hmm. You have a lovely skin, my dear. So moist and tender. No wrinkles.

ALICE: Will you let him go, if I . . . if I . . . ?

O'DOR: Yes, yes . . . you smell good, too. Like a salad . . . very fragrant. But delicate.

ALICE: What do you want to know? Our army . . .

O'DOR: Yes, yes, the army. I have heard that you carrots have ways of making love . . . is it true? . . . certain ways—

(He caresses the back of her neck.)

ALICE (*hurriedly*): The navy . . . the marines . . .

O'DOR: We could make such beautiful communion together.

ALICE: What are you doing?

O'DOR: What freshness! What youth! I love you.

ALICE: You're mad . . .

O'DOR: It's too strong for me . . . I must have you!

ALICE: Don't touch me . . . the air force . . .

O'DOR: Please . . . no more statistics. They are published, anyway, every day in your newspapers. When we are ready, we will strike . . . First, we lull you to sleep. Then—when you are snoring—forward march! Kiss me.

ALICE: Never!

O'DOR: My blood is boiling!

ALICE: Odious onion!

(O'Dor grabs her, they struggle for a moment, and she falls to her knees. He steps back.)

ALICE (*weeping*): *Visi d'arte, visi d'amore.* I lived only for love, and for joy, and to do a little singing . . . I harmed no one. Why has this happened to me?

O'DOR: I am suffocating . . .

ALICE: Ah me—the happy gardens of my youth, the gentle showers, the warm sun of summer in which I grew, the scented air . . . my young heart trembling with delight at the first dandelion. . . . Was it for this I gave my blossoms to the breeze? What a way to treat me!

O'DOR: You are torturing me. Get up.

ALICE: Was it for this I spent my virtuous childhood in the company of the little celeries, my cousins? And played my girlish games among the cucumbers? To come to a breathless end in the arms of my enemy? The enemy of my country?

O'DOR: Stop crying! What has your country got to do with it? Be a little realistic.

ALICE: Oh, heaven!

O'DOR: You do not realize your situation. One word from me—and you are in the soup.

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ALICE: I would a thousand times liefer—

O'DOR: Or—what is perhaps more to the point—your friend Mr. Potter is left alone with the marigolds . . .

ALICE: No! Oh no!

O'DOR: Ah—that fetches you. You really care for him, don't you?

ALICE: More than life.

O'DOR: All the better. It is much more exciting to make love to a woman already in love. It adds a kind of seasoning—a sauce, as it were . . .

ALICE: You—you nettle! You noisome weed!

O'DOR: Splendid—splendid. So sweet, and so hot. Almost Spanish.

ALICE: Is this the way you make war? On helpless women and children?

O'DOR: (*Taken aback.*) War? Who is making war? I am paying you compliments!

ALICE: They are odious to me.

O'DOR: Very well . . . we will try Mr. Potter in the muerte vines. Have you ever seen them work? First they grasp their victim like this. (*He grasps hold of her.*) Then they twine about him; then, slowly, they shred the flesh into . . .

ALICE: No—No . . . I can't stand it. I can't fight any more.

O'DOR: You give up? You give in?

ALICE (*dully*): Will he have a safe conduct back to my father?

O'DOR: Yes, yes . . .

ALICE: Will there be one for me? . . . . Afterwards?

O'DOR: Afterwards.

ALICE: Write it out . . .

O'DOR: (*Going to his desk, and writing.*) You do not trust me? Some day you will be ashamed of that. For Mr. Potter—a pass; also for Mr. Caudle. And now—for Miss Alice . . . (*He rings a buzzer; the door opens and Spindle enters.*) Spindle—you will let the Earth-men go. And later, you will see that this lady is returned to her own people—just like Palmieri.

SPINDLE: Mrs. Palmieri?

O'DOR: That's the one. *Just like Palmieri*—you understand?

SPINDLE: (*Making a circle of his fingers.*) I understand, Little Father.

O'DOR: Right?

SPINDLE: Right. Just like Palmieri. Mrs.

(He goes out.)

O'DOR: Now—oh most divine creature . . .

(He rises, and moves upon Alice. She has backed against the desk; her hands, groping, have found a paper cutter; she clutches it.)

O'DOR: At last—you are all mine . . .

(As he reaches for her, she stabs him.)

ALICE: It is thus a carrot kisses!

(He falls. She looks at the knife in horror, sniffs it, shudders, and throws it away. Then she takes

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two candles from the desk, lights them, and places one at the dead onion's head, and one at his feet. She backs slowly to the door, wipes her streaming eyes, blows her nose; and turning, goes swiftly out.)

ACT TWO: *Scene 4*

(*The corridor outside O'Dor's office. Potter and Caudle hurry up, while Alice comes out of the door, still wiping her eyes, and shuts it behind her.*)

POTTER: Alice!

ALICE: Thank God you're safe!

(She falls into his arms.)

POTTER: You are crying?

ALICE: It's nothing. It's only onion juice. Here are your passes—go quickly—both of you!

POTTER: And you?

ALICE: My pass is for later. I must wait for a little while. It's better so . . .

POTTER: But why?

ALICE: If I go with you now, they'll be suspicious. I must try to save you—

POTTER: No! If we have to die—then we'll die together!

ALICE: No, my dear. That wouldn't help my country—or this little world—or even me. You see—I've become very sensible; realistic they call it here. I'm not important—but *you* are; because you have the gift of peace. Think of all the wonderful things you can teach us . . . to keep the world safe for celery . . . the celery family. . . . Don't you see? It doesn't matter about *me*; I'm just a girl who had a good time in the world; and maybe it's over now . . . maybe that's all there is, there isn't any more. 'The leaves are falling, so am I . . .' Goodbye; think of me . . . and never ask the price of freedom. I'll try to catch up to you at the frontier. If I don't come—be kind to carrots—for my sake. Go now—and God bless you.

CAUDLE: (*Looking at his watch.*) I can just make my broadcast . . .

ALICE: 'I strove with none, for none was worth my strife.
Nature I loved, and, after Nature, Art:
I warmed both hands before the fire of life . . .'

(Potter takes her hands in his and gazes at her.)

CAUDLE (*impatiently*): Come on—come on—

ALICE: 'It sinks, and I am ready to depart.'

CAUDLE: We'll only just make it.

ALICE: Go now; and hurry.

POTTER: Farewell!

(Potter and Caudle hurry off. A moment later six leeks enter, headed by Spindle, all dressed as chefs, each carrying a huge spoon. They pass Alice without looking at her, and go into O'Dor's office. She flattens herself in terror against the wall. In the office

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there is a silence, broken by a sudden outcry. The door is flung open, and the chefs emerge. They see Alice, and slowly, inexorably bear down on her. . . .

(*In the darkness, a broadcast. There is the crackle of static; then Caudle's voice.*)

CAUDLE'S VOICE: Calling NBC. . . . Calling NBC. Come in, Earth. Come in. This is Caudle on Venus. Are you there, NBC? This is the historic moment, for which mankind has waited since the world began. You are about to hear the first voice from another planet . . . by courtesy of Southwest Oil, Heidelberg (Wisconsin) Beer. . . . (*As though to someone in the studio.*) What's that? I can't hear you . . . (*Broadcasting again*) There's a certain amount of excitement here, folks —which you can easily understand under the circumstances. Stand by now. In a minute, across thirty million miles of darkness and empty space, you will hear the voice of . . . of . . . (*To someone in the studio.*) What? She *what? Alice? In a soup?* . . .

(The static takes over.)

EPILOGUE

(*The cashier's desk at a Super Market. Mrs. Potter has brought a market basket up to be counted. The cashier is a middle-aged lady. Mrs. Potter is not unattractive.*)

MRS. POTTER: Let's see . . . one peas, one cauliflower . . .

CASHIER: You must be very happy to have your husband back again, Mrs. Potter. And all those write-ups in the papers! My goodness! Did he really get to Venus, like they said? I missed the broadcast.

MRS. POTTER: Yes, he did. One ketchup—

CASHIER: He looks a little thin, in his pictures. I guess maybe they didn't have much to eat up there.

MRS. POTTER: I guess not . . .

CASHIER: What was it like?

MRS. POTTER: He hasn't said much . . . and four dozen onions, please . . .

CASHIER (*astonished*): Four dozen?

MRS. POTTER: That's right. He —he eats them. Raw.

CASHIER: Raw? They say onions are good for colds.

MRS. POTTER: I know.

CASHIER: There's lots of things like that. Like carrots make your hair curly.

MRS. POTTER: He won't touch carrots.

CASHIER: He won't? Not even cooked?

MRS. POTTER: Not even. I served a petite marmite the other night, and he got up and left the table.

CASHIER: No! Now isn't that something!

MRS. POTTER: One sack of peat moss.

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CASHIER: What's that for?

MRS. POTTER: He says he's got blossoms in his hair.

CASHIER: Humph! . . . (*She looks at Mrs. Potter, then rings up the charges, with a slightly befuddled air.*) That'll be $3.47, Mrs. Potter. I'll have someone take them out to the car for you.

MRS. POTTER: (*Paying her.*) Thank you. . . .

(She leaves.)

CASHIER: Goodbye now. (*She takes hold of a lock of her own hair, and peers up at it. She lets it fall back into place, and shrugs her shoulders helplessly.*) Blossoms? . . . In February?

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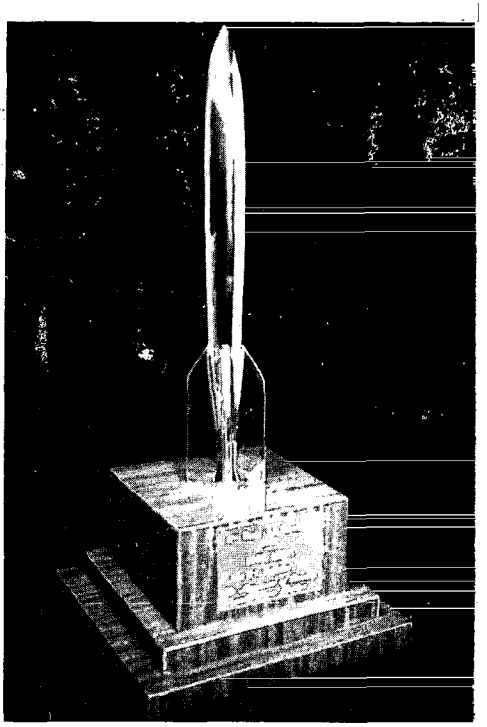

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